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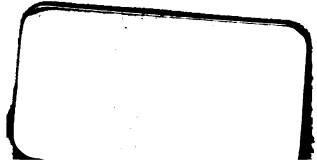
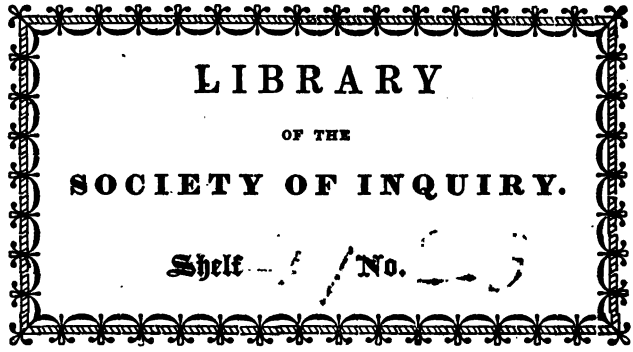
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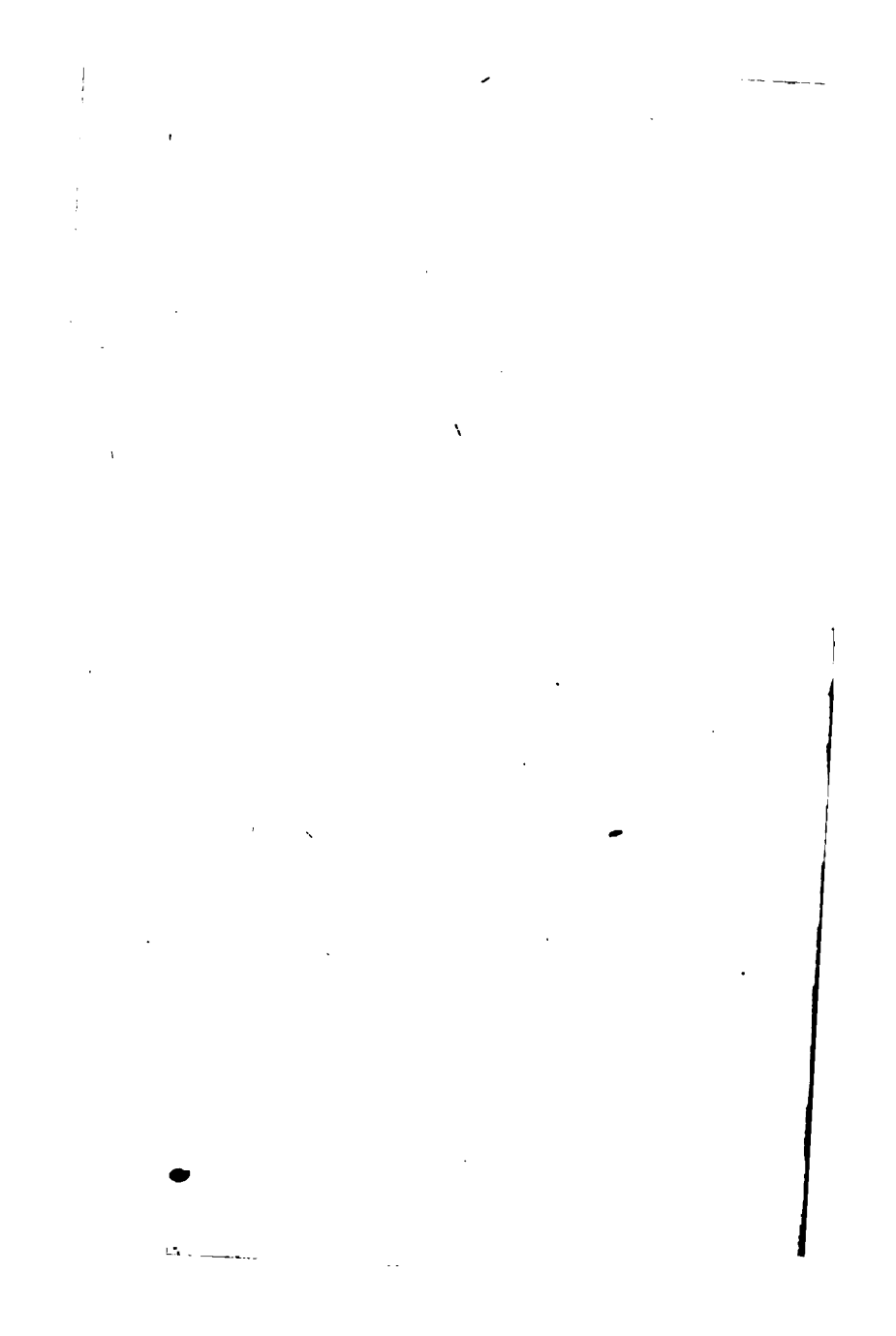


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AN  
ESSAY  
ON  
FAITH.



BY THOMAS ERSKINE, ESQ.  
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AUTHOR OF "REMARKS ON THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR  
THE TRUTH OF REVEALED RELIGION."



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AN  
ESSAY ON FAITH.

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WE read in the Scriptures, "that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law," Rom. iii. 18,—that "by grace are ye saved through faith," Eph. ii. 8,—that the glory of the Gospel consists in this, that "God's method of justification by faith is revealed in it," Rom. i. 17,—and that "he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life," St. John iii. 36. And these texts do not appear as insulated observations, nor are they liable to be explained away as figurative expressions, or strong language; they constitute most important parts in the reasoning of the sacred writers, and the general tone of the context is that of sober and unimpassioned argument. We ought not then to wonder, that there should be a very lively and inquisitive interest excited in the minds of those who receive the Scriptures as the inspired word of God, about the precise mean-

ing of the term *faith*. Neither ought we to wonder that many different meanings have been assigned to it. For as faith on the one hand, and unbelief on the other, describe states of mind which appear often to be absolutely involuntary, being the admission of evidence which it is impossible to reject, or the rejection of evidence which it is impossible to admit; men have found it difficult to reconcile their minds to the association of eternal happiness with the one, and of eternal misery with the other, as their just and equitable consequences. To lessen this difficulty, or to remove it, some have supposed that faith was a symbolical expression for the whole regenerate character, or all virtues; and that unbelief was a symbolical expression for the unregenerate character, or all vices. Others have supposed that faith is one of two necessary conditions of pardon, the other condition being obedience, the absence of either of which made the other nugatory, and effectually excluded from the Divine favor. Others, clearly perceiving that these views could not be reconciled, either with the general tenor of the Bible, or with many most decided and unequivocal texts, have talked disparagingly of holiness and obedience, and have treated of faith as if it were the channel of justification, merely in virtue of an arbitrary appointment of God, and without any reference to its moral effect on the human character.

In the observations which I am now to make, I shall point out the sources of some of the errors which have prevailed on this subject—I shall explain what appears to me to be the correct view of Christian faith in its exercise and object—and I shall attempt to describe some of its counterfeits.

Doubtless the great source of error on this subject, is the corruption of the heart. There is a great fallacy in supposing that faith is an involuntary act. The Bible speaks of faith as a duty, and of unbelief as a sin. There are some who object to this language, and prefer calling faith a privilege; and truly it is a most unspeakable privilege. But if “he who believes not is condemned already, because he believeth not in the name of the only begotten Son of God,” surely unbelief is a sin, and it is our *duty* to avoid this sin; John iii. 18. vi. 28, 29. According to the Bible, then, faith is an act of the will, for *duty* and *sin* imply the action of the will. And our reason speaks in the same way. If the belief of any fact naturally and imperatively calls for the performance of a particular duty, who is the man that will most easily be persuaded of the truth of the fact? He who takes a pleasure in the performance of the duty, or he who detests it? Have not love and fear, and indolence and interest, very considerable influence over our belief? A surgeon who, in

the midst of a tempestuous night, is assailed by a rumour, that a beggar, at the distance of ten miles off, has broken his leg, and claims his assistance, will more readily admit of opposite evidence, than if the circumstances were entirely changed, that is, if the night were day, if the ten miles off were next door, and the beggar a rich nobleman. I do not mean merely to say that he would more willingly go in the one case than in the other, but that his conscientious belief could be more easily engaged in the one case than in the other. He who knew what was in man, after declaring, that "he who believeth on the Son" "is not condemned, but he that believeth not" "is condemned already," adds immediately, "and this is the condemnation, that light is" "come into the world, and men have *loved*" "darkness rather than light, because their" "deeds were evil;" thus most explicitly referring belief and unbelief to the state of the heart and affections. But though the sin of the heart is the root of all errors in religion, yet it is of importance to consider those errors separately, that we may know them, and be prepared for them; for it is by blinding our understandings that the deceitfulness of the heart operates.

In the Bible, Christianity is given us as a whole; but men are apt to take confined and partial views of it. Faith is connected in Scripture, both with the pardon of sin and

with the deliverance from the power of sin ; or in other words, with justification and sanctification, according to common language. In its connexion with justification, it is opposed to merit, and desert, and work of every description ; “ It was by faith that it might be “ by grace, or gratuitous, or for nothing,” Rom. iv. 16. Some exclusively take this view, which in itself is correct, but which does not embrace the *whole* truth. Faith, as connected with sanctification, “ purifieth the “ heart,” “ worketh by love,” and “ over- “ cometh the world,” and produces every thing which is excellent and holy, as may be seen in that bright roll which is given in Heb. xi. Some again are so engrossed with this view of the subject, that they lose sight of the former. This is a fruitful source of error. In order to understand thoroughly the separate parts of a whole, we must understand their connexion with the other parts, and their specific purpose in relation to the whole. The first of the two classes that have been described, call the other *legalists*, or persons who depend on their own performances for acceptance with God. And they are perhaps right in this accusation ;—but they are not aware that they are very possibly guilty of the same offence. They are almost unconsciously very apt to think, that they have paid faith as the price of God’s favour. The man who considers faith merely as the channel by

which the Divine testimony concerning pardon through the blood of the Lamb is conveyed to his understanding, and operates on his heart, cannot look on faith as a work, because he views it merely as the inlet by which spiritual light enters his soul. Whilst he who considers the declaration, "he that believeth shall be saved," as expressing the arbitrary condition on which pardon will be bestowed, without referring to its natural effects on the character, requires to be very much on his guard indeed against a dependance on his faith as a meritorious act. He will not to be sure speak of it in this way, but he runs great risk of feeling about it in this way. And it is not unworthy of observation, that those, whose statements in this respect have been the highest, have often, in their controversies, assumed towards their opponents a tone of bitterness and contempt, most unbecoming the Christian character. This looks like self-righteousness, and seems to mark that they are trusting rather in their own faith, which elevates them, than in the cross of Christ, which would humble them.

In like manner, the second of these classes charge the other with antinomianism, though they themselves are liable to the same charge. They hate the name of antinomianism, and they wish to escape from it, as far as possible, but they mistake the way. They are so much occupied with the Christian character, that

they forget the doctrine of free grace, by the influence of which doctrine alone, that character can be formed. They endeavour to become holy by sheer effort. Now this will never do. They can never love God by merely trying to love him, nor can they hate sin by merely trying to hate it. The belief of the love of God to sinners—and of the evil of sin—as manifested in the cross of Christ, can alone accomplish this change within them. Those who substitute effort for the Gospel, preach antinomianism; because they preach a doctrine which can never, in the nature of things, lead to the fulfilment of the law.

I shall have occasion to illustrate these topics farther in the conclusion of the Essay; and in the meantime let us consider how, and to what extent, the introduction of scholastic metaphysics into religion has obscured and perplexed the subject of faith.

Theological writers have distinguished and described different kinds of faith, as speculative and practical,—historical, saving and realizing faith. It would be of little consequence what names we gave to faith, or to any thing else, provided these names did not interfere with the distinctness of our ideas of the things to which they are attached; but as we must be sensible that they do very much interfere with these ideas, we ought to be on our guard against any false impressions which may be received from an incorrect use of them.



Is it not evident that this way of speaking has a natural tendency to draw the attention away from *the thing to be believed*, and to engage it in a fruitless examination of the *mental operation of believing*? And yet is it not true, that we see and hear of more anxiety amongst religious people, about their faith being of the right kind, than about their believing the right things? A sincere man, who has never questioned the Divine authority of the Scripture, and who can converse and reason well on its doctrines, yet finds perhaps that the state of his mind and the tenor of his life do not agree with the Scripture rule. He is very sensible that there is an error somewhere, but instead of suspecting that there is something in the very essentials of Christian doctrine which he has never yet understood thoroughly, the probability is that he, and his advisers, if he ask advice, come to the conclusion that his faith is of a wrong kind, that it is speculative or historical, and not true saving faith. Of course this conclusion sends him not to the study of the Bible, but to the investigation of his own feelings, or rather of the laws of his own mind. He leaves that truth which God has revealed and blessed as the medicine of our natures, and bewilders himself in a metaphysical labyrinth.

The Bible is throughout a practical book, and never, in all the multitude of cases which it sets before us for our instruction, does it

suppose it possible for a man to be ignorant, or in doubt whether he really believes or not. It speaks indeed of faith unfeigned, in opposition to a hypocritical pretence—and it speaks of a dead faith when it denies the existence of faith altogether. We deny the existence of benevolence, argues the apostle, when fair words are given instead of good offices ; even so we may deny the existence of faith when it produces no fruit, and merely vents itself in professions,—in such a case faith is departed, it is no more, it is dead—there is a carcass to be sure to be seen, but the spirit is gone. In the place to which I am now referring, viz. in the second chapter of James, the writer gives another account of dead faith, which is very important ; it occurs in the 19th verse. This faith he calls dead, because it relates to an object which, when taken alone, can produce no effect upon our minds : “ Thou believest that there is one God, thou dost well, the devils also believe and tremble.” Now the mere belief of the unity of the Godhead, however important when connected with other truths, cannot of itself make a man either better or happier. What feeling or act is there which springs directly from a belief of the unity of the Godhead ? When connected with other things, it does produce effects ; thus the devils connect it with a belief in the avenging justice of God, and hence they tremble, because there is no other God ;

no other power to appeal to. Christians connect it with a belief in the love of God through the Redeemer, and hence they have good hope, for none can pluck them out of His hands. But the abstract belief that there is one God, leads to nothing. Since the Epistle of St. James has been thus introduced, it may appear proper that some explanation should be given of the apparent discrepancy between his doctrine and that of St. Paul. The two Apostles are speaking evidently of two different things—St. Paul is speaking of the way in which a sinner may approach God—St. James is speaking of the way in which the Christian character is confirmed by the various events and duties of life, and in which it manifests its reality to the conviction of men. When Paul says that “a man is justified by faith without works,” he means that a man receives pardon through the channel of faith without any good desert of his own.—When James says that “a man is justified by works and not by faith only,” he means that the character is perfected, not by a principle which lies inert in the mind, but by a principle which exercises itself in action.—The use made of the instance of Abraham seems to favour this interpretation. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith

“made perfect?” The word *dikaïoumai*, I am justified or pardoned, as it generally denotes, may signify, I am made or I become a just or good man; and it does occur in this sense in the version of the Old Testament by the Seventy. I am much disposed to be of opinion that this is the proper meaning of it, in the passage before us. The general text or subject of the two first chapters is contained in the 2d and 3d verses of the first chapter: “Brethren, count it all joy when you fall into  
 “diverse trials, knowing this, that the trial  
 “of your faith worketh constancy, or giveth  
 “it (your faith) consistency and endurance.” The Apostle enlarges upon this text; he teaches them, that faith unexercised grows weaker, and at last dies; and, on the other hand, that every exercise of it adds to its strength. The character thus advances one way or another, and we are ripening either for the harvest of eternal life or of eternal misery continually; because either the principle of faith or the principle of self-will is exercised by every thought, or word, or deed that proceeds from us. This is certainly a very important view of the subject, whether it be the right view of the passage or not; but I think that the context favours it. Thus the reference to Abraham would have this meaning: “Did the character of our father Abraham advance so, that he became the friend  
 “of God, by sitting still and allowing his be-

“lief of the Divine kindness to him to lie dormant?—No; it advanced by action, it was both proved and exercised by the offering up of Isaac, and by such exercise was the principle of faith carried on to its perfection.” The common interpretation of the passage supposes that “to be justified,” here signifies to be proved just, and means the same thing as the expression in the 18th verse, “to show faith by works;” and this may be the true meaning, though I prefer the other as being more coherent with the rest of the argument.

But to return from this digression. It is not an easy, because it is not a natural exercise of the mind, to look into itself, and to examine its various susceptibilities, and the mode or law according to which these are excited by external objects; and whilst we are engaged in this manner, we must necessarily remain to a great degree unaffected by those external objects, which we are using merely as parts of the apparatus required for making the experiment on our own faculties. We must endeavour to be in some degree affected by them, in order that we may observe the mode in which they affect us; but that degree will necessarily be very inconsiderable, in consequence of our attention being chiefly directed towards our own feelings. If I am intent on examining and investigating that pleasing emotion, which is produced in the

mind by the contemplation of the beauties of nature, it is impossible that I can feel much of that pleasure. I may be surrounded by all that is sublime and all that is lovely in creation—the rising sun may invite my enthusiasm, but Memnon's lyre is silent, I remain untouched, for I am contemplating my own mind, and not the scene before me: and that power unseen, which Akenside describes as “*throned in his bright descending car,*” must attract and absorb the attention, before it can diffuse afar any tenderness of mind.—The delightful feeling is produced by contemplating the external object; not by observing nor by knowing *how* we enjoy it. The more thoroughly we are occupied by the object, the more thoroughly will our pleasurable susceptibilities be excited; and the more interrupted and distracted our contemplation of the object is, the more inconsiderable will be the gratification arising from it. We cannot excite the pleasing emotion by mere effort, without the real or imagined presence of its natural exciting object, and whilst we attempt to analyse the origin and progress of the emotion, the object fades from our view, and the sensation dies along with it. Our minds are in this respect like mirrors, and the impressions made on them resemble the images reflected by mirrors. No effort of ours can produce an image in the mirror, independent of its proper corresponding object. When that

object is placed before it, the image appears, and when it is withdrawn, the image disappears. And if, in the minuteness of our examination of the image, we look too narrowly into the mirror, we may find that we have interposed ourselves between the mirror and the object, and that, instead of the image which we expected, our own face is all that we can discover. I beg the reader to bear in mind, that these observations do not at all interfere with the Christian duty of self-examination, which relates not to the philosophy of the human mind, but to the actual state of the human heart.

The science of the human mind requires this reflex exertion, because its object is to examine and discover the laws according to which the mind acts, or is acted upon ; but Christianity requires no such act, because its object is not to discover the laws according to which the mind is impressed, but actually to make impressions on the mind, by presenting to it, objects fitted and destined for this purpose by Him who made the mind, and fixed its laws. The objects of religion were not revealed to us, to sharpen our faculties, by observing how they were fitted to impress the mind, but that our minds might really be impressed by them with the characters of happiness and holiness. These characters are the subjects of self-examination, and they are all contained in the Divine precepts. Do we

love God and our neighbour, and do we give proof of the reality of our love by corresponding action? This is a very different process from that to which I am referring. My object is, to point out the folly of attempting or expecting to make any impressions on our minds by mere effort, instead of bringing them into contact with those objects which God has made known to us in the Gospel as the proper means of producing those impressions—and especially to warn against that particular species of this general error, which consists in considering rather *how* we believe than *what* we believe.

From this metaphysical habit of considering and attending to the mind itself, and the mode in which it is impressed, rather than to the objects which make the impression, arose the division of faith into different kinds; and thus the feelings of men were substituted in the place of the tangible word of revelation.

A true faith does not properly refer to the mode of believing, but to the object believed. It means the belief of a true thing. As a correct memory does not refer to the process by which the impression is made, but to the accurate representation of the fact remembered. It means the remembrance of a thing as it happened. When after hearing a person relate incorrectly any history with which we are acquainted, we say, "he has a bad



"memory," we mean merely that he has not remembered what happened. So when we say that a man has a wrong belief of a thing, we ought to mean merely that he does not believe the thing which really happened. The way to correct the memory is not to work with the faculty itself independently of its object, but to attend more minutely and carefully to that object. And this is the only way of correcting the belief too. Were a man, when endeavouring to recollect some circumstance which had escaped him, to direct his attention to the act of recollection rather than to the thing to be remembered, he would infallibly fail in his purpose. In like manner, if he wishes to believe any thing, there can be no more successful way of thwarting his own wish, than by directing his attention to the mental operation of believing, instead of considering the thing to be believed, and the evidence of its truth.

But is there no such thing as a wrong or false way of believing what is true? Are not the most important truths often believed without producing the slightest effect on the character? Do we not sometimes find men who are prepared to die as martyrs to the truth of a doctrine which never influenced a feeling of their hearts? Let us pick out two of our acquaintances, and let us question them separately as to their religious belief, concerning God and eternity, and their own duties and

their own hopes; the answers which they give are in substance the same, and yet their paths in life are diametrically opposite; the life of the one is in harmony with the belief which he professes, the other's is not. They are both incapable of deceit; how then are we to account for this difference, except by supposing that there is a right and a wrong way of believing the same thing? This is certainly a very important question, and it seems to me capable of a very satisfactory solution. Although these two persons use similar language, and appear to believe the same things, yet in reality they differ essentially in the subject-matter of their belief. But this requires farther illustration. We are so much accustomed to satisfy ourselves with vague ideas on the subject of religion, that we are easily deceived by a general resemblance of statements with regard to it; and the word *faith* has been so much withdrawn from common use, and so much devoted to religious purposes, that it has very much lost its real import. To have faith in a thing, to believe a thing, and to understand a thing as a truth, are expressions of the same import. No man can be properly said to believe any thing which is addressed to his thinking faculty, if he does not understand it. Let us suppose a Chinese, who can speak no language but his own, brought before an English jury as a witness. Let him bring with him certificates

and testimonials of character which place his truth and integrity above all suspicion. There is not a doubt entertained of him. But he gives his evidence in his own language. I ask, does any juryman believe him? Certainly not,—it is absolutely impossible—nobody understands a word that he utters. If, during the course of the evidence, the jury were asked whether or not they believed what he was telling them, would they not smile at the question? And yet they know that it is truth. They *understand* that the witness is an honest man, and they *believe* as far as they understand, but they *can believe* no farther. An interpreter is brought—he translates the evidence ; *now* the jury understand it, and their belief accompanies their understanding. If one of the jury had understood Chinese, the difference between his belief and that of the rest, would have been accurately measured, by the difference of their understandings. They all heard the same sounds, and saw the same motions, but there was only one of them, to whom these symbols conveyed any meaning. Now the meaning was the thing of importance to be believed—and the proof of the man's integrity was of consequence merely on account of the authority which it gave to his meaning.

Faith and reason are so often talked of as not only distinct from, but even opposed to each other, that I feel it of importance to

press this point, by farther examples from familiar life. Several merchants receive from their correspondent at a distance, letters recommending them to follow a particular course in their trade, in order to escape a threatened loss, and to ensure a considerable profit. And this advice is accompanied by the information and reasons on which it is founded. The speculation requires a good deal of hardihood, and a most implicit confidence in the information communicated. One of the merchants, on reading his letter, cannot believe that he is in any such danger as is represented to him—he declares the letter a forgery, and throws it into the fire. Another knows the handwriting too well, to doubt of its really coming from the person whose name it bears; but he does not believe its contents, and therefore does not act according to its instructions. A third reads his letter as an essay on mercantile affairs in general, without observing the application of it to his own immediate circumstances, or the call that it makes on him for instantaneous action; and therefore he also is unmoved by it. A fourth acknowledges the signature and the authority of the information, but reads the letter carelessly, and takes up a wrong idea of the course recommended, and sets about a speculation, before he has made himself acquainted with his correspondent's plan; and consequently receives as little benefit from the communication as any of the

former. Now it is quite clear that not one of the four believed the information of their correspondent. Their unbelief is of different kinds, but the result is the same in all. A letter is merely the vehicle of a meaning, and if that meaning is not believed, the letter itself is not believed. The two first understood the meaning of the letter, and rejected it openly and professedly on its own merits. The two last openly and professedly assented to it, but they believed their own interpretation of it, and not the meaning of the writer. It is an absolute absurdity to say that a meaning can be believed without being understood—and therefore nothing which has a meaning can be fully believed until the meaning is understood. When a thing is said or done, of which we don't perceive the meaning, we say, we don't understand that. We are sure that the word has been spoken or the action performed, but we don't apprehend its import. Can we possibly then *believe* that import? In such cases, understanding and belief are one and the same thing. The third and fourth merchants could perhaps both of them repeat the letter by memory; and the third especially, though ignorant, and therefore unbelieving as to its immediate application, could probably talk well of its general principles, and quote Adam Smith in illustration or defence of it. There is a fifth, who reads, acknowledges the signature, understands the

contents, believes them, and acts accordingly. This man believes the meaning of his correspondent, and if the information was good, he reaps the full advantage of it.

In religion there cannot be any cases parallel to that of the second merchant. No man can believe that the Bible was written by God, and at the same time openly profess to disbelieve its contents ; and there are not very many who avow their unbelief of the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures. But there are many nominal Christians in situations very closely resembling that of the jurymen above mentioned, and of the third and fourth merchants. Are there not many who would be astonished and hurt if their Christianity were doubted, who evidently attach as little meaning to the words *Judgment*, *Eternity*, and *Justification by faith in Christ*, as those men did to the Chinese vocables ? Can these be said to believe ? Are there not many who can speak and reason orthodoxly and logically on the doctrines of the Gospel, and yet do not understand the urgency of these doctrines in application to their own souls ? These do not believe the meaning of the Gospel surely. And are there not many who, mistaking the whole scope of the Bible, find in it, what is not there, a plan of justification, in which man performs some part, if not the whole, in the work of redemption ; or see in it merely a list and a description of duties, by the per-

formance of which, a man may recommend himself to the favour of God? Those who believe this, believe their own vain imagination, and not the Gospel. A man who is honest in his belief of that which he professes to believe, is certainly free from the charge of deceit and hypocrisy; but his honesty will not convert a lie into a truth; it cannot make that good news, which is not good news; it cannot change the import of the Bible, or the will of God. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" was Philip's question to the Eunuch; and it is a question which each reader of the Bible should put most jealously to himself; for, as it is said in the parable of the sower, "when any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and *understandeth it not*, then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart."

The Jews believed in the Divine authority and inspiration, by which Moses spoke—they had much more reverence for his name and honour than the great bulk of professing Christians have for the name and honour of the Saviour—and yet He who knew the thoughts of the heart, declared that they did not believe Moses; "for," says Jesus Christ, "had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me; but if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" He does not mean here, to question their belief that God had indeed

spoken by Moses ; but to deny their belief of Moses's meaning. They did not understand Moses, and therefore they could not believe him—they believed their own interpretation of his law, not his own meaning in it.

I may understand many things which I do not believe ; but I cannot believe any thing which I do not understand, unless it be something addressed merely to my senses, and not to my thinking faculty. A man may with great propriety say, I understand the Cartesian system of vortices, though I don't believe in it. But it is absolutely impossible for him to believe in that system without knowing what it is. A man may believe in the ability of the maker of a system, without understanding it ; but he cannot believe in the system itself, without understanding it. Now there is a meaning in the Gospel, and there is declared in it the system of God's dealings with men. This meaning, and this system, must be understood, before we can believe the Gospel. We are not called on to believe the Bible merely that we may give a proof of our willingness to submit in all things to God's authority, but that we may be influenced by the objects of our belief. When the Apostle of the Gentiles gives a reason why he is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, he does not say because it is a message from the King of kings ; he does not found its importance simply on the authority of the promulgator of it,



but in a great measure on its own intrinsic and intelligible value—"For it is the power " of God *unto salvation* to every one who " believeth," Rom. i. 16. Salvation here signifies *healing*, or deliverance, not from the condemnation, but from the influence of sin. His reason for not being ashamed of this Gospel then was, because it was the mighty instrument which God had prepared for healing the spiritual diseases of men. The great importance of the object to be attained by the publication of the Gospel invested it with its high dignity. But he does not leave his Roman disciples here ; he explains to them, *how* this great object is attained—he tells them what it is in the Gospel which produces this effect—"for," continues he in the 17th verse, " herein is revealed God's plan of justification " by faith." Righteousness, through this Epistle, almost without exception, signifies the mercy of God manifested in pardoning sinners for the sake of the atonement of Christ. He is afterwards at much pains to demonstrate to them, that the belief of this mercy has, from the very nature of man, that healing influence which he had ascribed to it. I may remark here, that the passage of Malachi, in which the Messiah is predicted under the figure of the Sun of Righteousness, or forgiving mercy, bears a striking resemblance in meaning to the verses which have been quoted from the Epistle to the Romans. The Apos-

tle represents justification, or the remission of sins, as the prominent feature and characteristic of the Gospel, and to this he ascribes the whole of its healing or salutary power,—and the prophet's eye, in like manner, is caught by the absorbing glory and brilliancy of this plan of redemption—he sees from afar a new manifestation of the Divine character rising on the dark world. Many and diversified are the high attributes of that character; but as the different rays of the natural light, when combined, appear but one brightness—so the many rays of that spiritual light, when combined, appear but one Sun of Mercy—and the beams which this Sun shoots forth, are pardons, which heal the hearts they enter.

In order then to the believing of the Gospel, it is necessary that the plan of justification by faith should be understood; because this is the prominent feature of the Gospel, and because the benefits bestowed by the Gospel, are communicated to the soul through the knowledge of this doctrine.

What is the difference between knowledge or understanding, and faith? Our understanding of a thing means the conception which we have formed of it, or the impression which it has made on our mind, without any reference to its being a reality in nature independent of our thought, or a mere fiction of the imagination: And faith is a persuasion, accompanying these impressions, that the ob-

jects which produced them are realities in nature, independent of our thought or perception. This persuasion of reality accompanies all the different modes in which our knowledge is acquired, as well as the testimony of others. When an object is presented to my eye, the impression which it makes upon me is accompanied by the persuasion, that the object which produced it is truly described by the impression which it has made, and that it is a reality independent of myself. When a proposition in mathematics is demonstrated to me, a persuasion accompanies my understanding of it, that these relations of quantities are fixed and unalterable, and altogether independent of my reasoning. When the generous or kind conduct of a friend meets my difficulties, my impression of the fact is accompanied by a persuasion of the reality of that generosity or kindness, as qualities existing in my friend's heart altogether independent of my thought or feeling on the subject. When I hear through a channel which appears to me authentic, of some melancholy or some joyful event, there is an accompanying persuasion that there is a real cause for joy or sorrow.

Faith, then, is just an appendage to those faculties of the mind by which we receive impressions from external objects, whether they be material or immaterial. It stands at the entrances of the mind as it were, and

passes sentence on the authenticity of all information which goes in. Now as faith is merely an appendage to another faculty, is it not evident that its existence and exercise, with regard to any particular object, must depend on the existence and exercise of that faculty to which the object is addressed? A man born blind has no impressions from light, and therefore he can have no faith with regard to such impressions. He has not the slightest conception of what is meant by a coloured body, and therefore he cannot believe in a coloured body. He may believe that bodies have a quality which he is incapable of perceiving, but what that quality is he does not know, and therefore cannot believe in it. Faith is the persuasion that the impression on the mind was produced by a real object. But if *no impression* is made upon the mind, what room is there for the exercise of belief? If he, like another blind man, has formed an idea that red is like the sound of a trumpet, the impression is a false one, and the belief appended to it is also false, that is, it is appended to a false impression. For faith must always derive its character from the impression to which it is appended.

If the impression is correct, the faith is correct; and if the impression is incorrect, the faith is incorrect. And when we are considering impressions as produced by objects supposed or known to be real, we may very

properly explain faith to be the impression made on our minds by some such object.

A man altogether destitute of the faculty of discerning the relation of numbers and quantities, could not understand how two and two make four;—there could be therefore no impression on his mind corresponding to this truth, and therefore there could be no faith in it. There are many persons whose minds have been so little exercised in this way, that, though they may not by nature be incapable of receiving such impressions, it would yet be absolutely impossible to make them comprehend a mathematical process of any intricacy. These persons may believe certain abstract truths on the authority of others; but they never can believe in the processes by which they are demonstrated, because there are no impressions on their minds corresponding to these processes. The same reasoning holds good with regard to our knowledge and belief on subjects which address our moral faculties, and other internal sensations. We must have impressions made on our minds corresponding to moral qualities, or to the conditions which address our sensitive nature, before we can believe in those qualities, or in the meaning of those events and conditions. How, for instance, do we become acquainted with the idea of danger, but by an impression of fear produced in our minds? Can we become acquainted with

it by any other way? Impossible; for the only meaning of danger is, that it is something fitted to excite fear. How do we become acquainted with the meaning of generous worth and excellence, but by the love, esteem, and admiration which they excite in us? To a man whose heart is utterly dead to kindness, what meaning could kindness convey? Where there are no moral impressions on the mind, there can be no belief on moral subjects; and according to the degree of the impression is the measure of the belief: For, in fact, the impression is the belief, and the belief is the impression.

In illustration of this, let us suppose two men travelling together whose minds are differently constituted. One has the ordinary degree of alarm at the idea of death; the other is entirely devoid of any such feeling. They come into a situation in which their lives are endangered. A stranger passing by, interposes between them and the danger, and saves their lives, but at the expense of his own. Our two travellers have both of them the use of their eyes and their ears, they have both of them seen and heard precisely the same things, and when they tell their story, their two narratives agree most minutely: And yet they believe two essentially different things. The one believes that the disinterested and heroic generosity of a stranger has saved them from what he cannot but consid-

er as a dark and awful fate. In consequence of this, he rejoices in his safety as far as his sorrow for his noble benefactor will permit—he feels himself laid under the most sacred obligation to reverence the memory of this benefactor, and to repay to his surviving friends or family that debt of gratitude which he owes for his deliverance. The other understands nothing, and consequently believes nothing of all this—he saw no evil in the death with which they were threatened, and of course no generosity in him who rescued them from it by encountering it himself—he neither feels joy, nor sorrow, nor gratitude, excited by any part of the history. These two men do not believe the same thing in two different ways; they in fact believe two different things. Examine the two impressions. They may be compared to the traces left by the same intaglio on two different substances—the one substance too solid to yield to the pressure, or receive the mould of the sculpture, exhibits nothing perhaps but the oval outline of the stone—whilst the other, possessing the right consistency, and coming in contact with every portion of the substance, receives and retains its perfect image, and exhibits, it may be, lineaments which express all that mind can grasp in thought or feel in tenderness. The mind of the one traveller has come in contact with every part of the action, and bears away accordingly the

impression of the whole; the mind of the other was incapable of coming in contact with the whole, and of course has received a most imperfect and partial impression. We can only know the qualities of things by corresponding susceptibilities in our own minds. The absence of the susceptibility of fear absolutely incapacitated our traveller for understanding danger, and consequently for comprehending the generosity of the stranger's interference, or for perceiving that there was any thing joyful in his own deliverance. The actions of men are not to be considered as mere external shells, or dead carcasses—they in so far resemble those who act them, that they have a spirit and internal life, as well as an outward form—and that this spirit constitutes their character. Of course then we do not understand nor believe a moral action, whilst we do not enter into its spirit and meaning: and we can only enter into the quality of its spirit, through the excitement of the corresponding susceptibilities of our own minds. In morals we really know only what we feel. We may talk about feelings which we never experienced, and perhaps even correctly enough; but it is just as a blind philosopher may talk about colours.

I have here put the extreme case of the total destitution of a particular susceptibility, and in such a case there can be no doubt of the result. But it is no less clear, that, even



when, there is no absolute destitution, there must always be a relative proportion between the degree of susceptibility possessed by the mind, and the capacity for understanding and believing in facts which address these susceptibilities.

There is a considerable analogy between faith and memory, which may serve to illustrate the character of both. As faith accompanies the exercise of the different faculties by which we acquire a knowledge of things external to ourselves, as a judge of the reality or non-reality of the objects which produce the impressions of which the mind is conscious; so memory accompanies these same faculties as a judge, whether the impressions made on them are new to the mind, or have been present to it before. It is quite evident that no blind man could be said to remember a colour—and that no man whatever could be said to remember what he never received an impression of.

We see, then, that the impression which any object makes on our minds, whatever that impression may be, sums up and defines our knowledge and belief of that object. We ought then to guard against being deceived by names. A number of men may receive impressions from the same object, and all these impressions may be different, and yet each of them will give to his own impression the common name of the object

which produced it. An indifferent hearer may, when he listens to their story, suppose that they all know and believe the same thing; but a judicious and curious questioner might discover from their own mouths, that amongst the whole, there are not two impressions alike. Compare, by way of a broad instance, the belief of a moss-rose entertained by a blind man—a man without the sense of smell—and a man in the full exercise of his external senses. There are evidently three different impressions made on these three minds, that is, there are three different beliefs; and yet there is but one name given to the three, and that is, the name of the object, to which they all refer.

Every object is composed of many parts and qualities, but all these subdivisions are summed up in the name given to the object which is their aggregate, and he who uses the general name is presumed to imply all the parts belonging to it. Thus a pillar of a hundred feet in height is talked of as if it were one and indivisible, whereas it consists of an infinite number of parts, the existence of each of which may be a distinct subject of knowledge and belief. A blind man who runs against it, knows and believes in a few square feet of it; but he does not believe in the remaining feet, for he has received no impression from them. After he is informed of the dimensions of the pillar, he believes

in a quite different thing from what he did before ; or rather perhaps, to speak more correctly, he believes in a number of things which he could not believe in before, because his mind had not come in contact with them.

In the same way actions, which combine a variety of parts, are commonly talked of as indivisible unities, although each motive may be a distinct subject of knowledge and belief, and by its presence or absence make an important change in the general impression.—The name remains the same, but the ideas are very different.

The Gospel is a general name likewise for an object which consists of several parts, and contains various appeals to the moral understanding of man. But this general name may cover a great many different impressions and beliefs—and yet there is but one impression that can be the correct representation of the object ; all the rest must be false in a greater or less degree. And it is only the true impression that can be profitable to us. And what is that true impression ? This is only another way of putting the question, What is the Gospel ? for the true impression must be a correct representation of the Gospel in all its meaning. This is the important point, for if we really understand what the Gospel is, and understand it as a truth, we need not be very solicitous about the *mode* in which

we believe it. What is the intention of the Gospel? Its intention is to renew the character of man after the likeness and will of God. It is to give happiness and holiness to the human heart. And this intention is accomplished by the revelation of the character of God in the work of redemption. This is evidently a moral intention, and the object presented to our view for the accomplishment of it is a moral object, even the character of God; the impression therefore on our minds must correspond to this object, that is to say, it must be a moral impression, otherwise we do not understand it, and therefore cannot believe it. By *impression*, I never mean the *effect* which an object when understood produces on the mind; I mean simply the *conception* which the mind forms of the object, independent altogether of its influence on the character. These two things are distinct from each other, the one being the cause and the other the effect. In order then to a full belief of the Gospel, there must be an impression or conception on our mind, representing every moral quality, and every truth contained and embodied in the facts of the Gospel history; for the Gospel consists not in the facts, but in the meaning of the facts. We are not left to interpret the facts ourselves, but along with the history of them, we have received the interpretation of them in the word of God. It is there written,

“that God so loved the world, as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” In order to understand and believe this, it is not enough to believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for sinners. We must receive impressions on our minds corresponding to the circumstances of our situation, which called for the interposition of Divine compassion; we are here described as *perishing*. We may have the general idea of perishing in our minds without fear or concern, and we may have the idea of others perishing without being much moved; but it is impossible that a man can be impressed with the fact of his being himself in a perishing state under a just condemnation of eternal misery, without much fear and concern. If then the Gospel implies that we are in this condition; and if the value of the deliverance which it proclaims, rests on the truth of its statement in this respect; we do not understand nor believe the Gospel, unless we have on our minds an impression corresponding to the fact that this condition is our deserved fate.

We must also receive on our minds impressions corresponding to a deliverance from this state. This impression must be joy; for deliverance from misery means that which produces joy. If the Gospel contains tidings of deliverance for persons in our circum-

stances, we do not understand it unless there be on our minds, the corresponding impression of joy.

If this interposition on our behalf proceeded from holy love, on the part of God ; we cannot understand the nature of the Gospel, unless we know both what holiness and love mean ; and this we cannot know by mere description. We must have on our minds impressions corresponding to holiness and love, before we can believe in holy love. Had we no affections, the Gospel would be in vain proclaimed to us, because it is addressed to the affections, and without them we could not understand it. And when they are unexercised upon it, it comes to the same thing as if we were without them.

Is it then with my heart or affections that I believe the Gospel ? No. No more than I believe colours with my eye. I cannot understand or believe in colours without the information which has been received through my eye. Neither can I understand or believe in happiness, or misery, or moral qualities, except by means of the information which has been received through my affections. If I am told by my friend that he has lately seen a flower of a particular colour, to which he applies a name that I never heard of before ; I cannot understand his information until he explains to me what colour he means, neither can I believe it, although I have ?

perfect confidence in his veracity. There is no impression on my mind corresponding to my friend's information, and so there can be no belief. And the case is the same with regard to the affections. In the Bible, the heart generally means the whole mind, and does not stand for the affections exclusively, as it does in our common language. In Rom. x. 10. the internal reception of the truth, is opposed to the external confession of it. The heart, in Rom. i. 21. evidently means the understanding. We cannot become acquainted with any thing, except by the impressions which it makes upon us. And these impressions are made on our different senses external and internal. As we know the taste of a substance by our palate, and its colour by our eye; so we know the joyfulness of an event, by the happiness which it produces in us, and the amiableness of an object by the love or admiration which we feel for it. Where the external sense is wanting, or diseased, or dormant, the information which we ought to receive from it, is deficient; and where the internal sense is dormant or weak, there is either no impression received, or a deficient one. Our external senses come in contact with the external form of objects and actions, and our internal senses come in contact with their spirit and meaning. If we do not come in contact with the whole, we do not understand the whole; we receive only a partial

impression, and that impression limits our belief. A belief of the Gospel, then, comprehends, not only the impressions corresponding to the external facts of the history, but also the impressions which correspond to all the moral qualities and conditions, therein attributed to God and man. If the Gospel was made known to us that it might conform our characters to the image of that God who is manifested in it, the perfection of our characters will depend on the perfection of the impressions which we receive from the Gospel. And the perfection of that impression will depend on our coming in contact with every part of the Gospel; and we only come in full contact with it, when those affections which are addressed by it, are really excited by it.

But can a corrupt mind receive any impression which may with fairness be said to represent the holy love of God? We cannot believe in holy love without knowing what it means, and how can a polluted heart acquire such an idea? Is faith in the Gospel a holy principle? Is it a new faculty? I would answer this question by another. Is the remembrance of the atonement, a holy principle or a new faculty? Both the belief and the memory are here exercised on a holy thing, the impressions to which they belong are received from a holy object, and that object has been presented to the heart by the Holy Spirit; but yet belief and memory are natural



exercises of the mind, and are conversant with the things of earth as well as the things of heaven.

Conscience gives us an idea of sin, and the idea of sin enables us, in some measure, to form a conception of its opposite, holiness. The corruption of a man does not consist in his acquiring wrong faculties, nor does the renewal of man consist in his having new faculties bestowed on him. His corruption consists in the misdirection of his faculties, and his renewal consists in their being directed to their proper objects. Holiness consists in this right direction of the thoughts and affections, in a love for their proper objects, and a distaste for their wrong objects. Man, in his depravity, has all the faculties which a child of God has, in this life. And he has a natural ability to use these faculties as he will. The inability, therefore, of a polluted creature to receive an impression of holy love, is not a natural inability; if he would, he could; his inability is moral, it lies in the opposition of his will and affections, and this is his crime. But whatever the cause of pollution may be, and whether the impossibility be natural or moral, a polluted heart cannot receive an impression of holy love. How then does the Gospel enter the heart; for are not all hearts polluted? Yes; but there is a Divine and Almighty agent, who opens the eyes of the understanding, and prepares the affections

to receive the truth, even the Holy Spirit, who takes of the things that are Christ's, and shows them unto the souls of men. And there is also a wonderful adaptation apparent in the Gospel itself to the heart of man in every condition. Its first address is to the very elements of our nature, to that instinct which seems common to us and the inferior animals,—self-preservation, and the desire of happiness.

This principle is a most powerful one. Joy and sorrow are mere expressions of self-love, and these are our ruling feelings, and maintain their sway most universally and constantly. They are the sources of our love and hatred, our hope and fear. We love and hope for that, in which we find joy; we dislike, and avoid, and fear that in which we find sorrow. These feelings exist, and are in exercise, in every mind, and the character depends on the objects by which they are excited.

The form in which the Gospel was announced by the angel to the shepherds of Bethlehem, marks its distinguishing characteristic to be joy, and points to these natural instincts as the feelings to which it is addressed. "Behold," said the heavenly messenger, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." This

message was dictated by Him who made the heart of man, and knew what was fitted to give it joy. It is therefore evident, that unless we see joy in the substance of the message, we do not understand it as God meant it, and therefore cannot believe it. We cannot believe that tidings are joyful to ourselves, unless we see that in them, which excites our joy. The matter of joy lay in the birth of the Deliverer. That person had appeared on earth who, according to Daniel's prediction, was to make an end of sin, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness. If we are convinced that we are in a state of ruin and condemnation, we cannot but consider the news of deliverance as tidings of great joy. But deliverance sounds poor to a man who does not feel that he requires it. The words of the message, it will be observed, make no allusion whatever to the moral nature of the Gospel; it addresses merely the feelings of joy and sorrow.

Behold these feelings, and then contemplate the glorious character of God; and let us join in praise to Him who hath condescended, through such obscure avenues, to introduce the light of that character into the soul of man. If the Gospel addressed merely our generous feelings, our love of what is right and excellent, our sense of what is beautiful and lovely, it would be a very different thing from what it is; it would be suited to

another order of beings, and with regard to us would scarcely be deserving the name of glad tidings. But, blessed be the name of our God—He hath addressed us in that character which cleaves closest to us—He hath spoken to us as base and polluted, but above all, as selfish beings. The very first principle which he addresses, is that of instinctive self-preservation. He meets the natural cry of misery, and the weary and undefined cravings of the unsatisfied spirit. His loudest and most general invitations, both in the Old and New Testaments, are addressed, not to the moral, but to the natural feelings; to the sense of misery, and the desire of happiness. “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,” Isaiah lv. 1. “Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” Matt. xi. 28. “Who-soever will, let him take of the water of life freely,” Rev. xxii. 17. At this despised door of nature the Saviour knocks, and through it He deigns to enter. He came to bind up the broken heart, and to comfort all that mourn. And many come, as it seems, led by the mere instinctive longing after enjoyment, and try the Gospel as a last and forlorn experiment, after the failure of every other attempt to obtain happiness. And, oh what an unlooked-for discovery do they make! he who had found no resting-place in the world, and who had wandered through it in

quest of some object, however insignificant, that might interest him, and for a moment at least remove the sense of that hopeless languor which lay dead upon his heart, finds now an object which his widest desires cannot grasp, even filial communion with God here, and the full enjoyment of Him through a magnificent eternity, on the very threshold of which he already stands. He who has felt himself too weak to resist the storms and roughnesses of life, learns to lean with confidence on Omnipotence. He whose conscience of sin has made life a burden to him, and at the same time has taught him to look with a vague horror to futurity, applies to that fountain which was opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness, and he has peace with God, through faith in Jesus Christ. The joy of the Gospel, though it may be at first sought and embraced in gratification of natural instinct, contains in it the principles of the Christian character. At first it may appear mere deliverance from misery, and in this view it attracts the miserable; but as the means by which this deliverance was effected are seen, its moral power develops itself, and that Spirit whose unfelt influence led them here for comfort, opens the eyes of their understandings to discern the truth, and prepares their affections to receive it in the love of it.

Joy precedes love. We must take delight in an object before we can love it. We must take delight in God's gifts before we can know them to be benefits, or feel grateful for them. We must take delight in his character before we can love Him. When we perceive that the safety and happiness of our souls for ever rest upon the character of God as manifested in the cross of Christ, we must take delight in that manifestation, and in the character so manifested ; and thus we learn to love them. When we see the faithfulness and justice of God, formerly so alarming to our guilty consciences, now not merely smiling on us, but actually becoming the foundation of assured hope through the satisfaction of the Saviour's blood, we must delight in them, and this delight will teach us love. This love and this delight will grow more and more disinterested. The glory of God will be contemplated with a rapture unmingled with selfish thoughts. "Thy loving kindness is better than life," says David, in the generous spirit of a child of God. Thy gifts are good and worthy of thyself, but still that love which bestowed them is far dearer to my heart than they—without that love even *thy* gifts would appear poor to me. The love of God produces likeness to God, and thus the joy of the Lord is the strength of his people.

It will be observed, that what I have already said on this subject, applies equally to those who were eye-witnesses of the events of the Saviour's life, and to those who have since heard or read the report of them. I am not speaking of the evidence on which the Gospel is believed, but on belief itself. We are too much accustomed, in a loose way, to oppose faith and sight to each other, without considering what it is which is seen, and what it is which is believed. Our eyes cannot see a meaning, nor a moral principle, although they may see the action in which it is embodied. The disciples and companions of Christ when upon earth, were called upon to exercise faith, just as we are in the present time—and the same causes which hindered their faith, hinder ours. Their faith was exercised in receiving the interpretation of the events and actions which they witnessed. That interpretation consisted in the delineation of the moral government and character of God, and his judgment on the character of man. This was evidently addressed to their moral feelings; and the accuracy of the impression on their minds, and consequently of their belief, depended entirely on the state of these feelings. If they had no such feelings at all, they could not believe at all. And in proportion to the strength and soundness of these moral feelings, would be the correctness of their understanding and their faith on the subject.

We are very apt to think that one man is as much in a condition to believe any moral history as another;—but if there be any difference in the strength or habitual bent of their moral feelings, there must be a proportional difference in the impression which the history will make on them, and of course in their belief. What can hinder a man of ordinary understanding from believing in a generous action, supposing that there is sufficient evidence of the fact? If the man has never felt a generous emotion in his own mind, he does not know what generosity is, and therefore cannot believe in it. If he has had some generous feelings, but has left them uncultivated and unexercised, the impression of generosity on his mind will be weak and imperfect, and so also will be his belief of it. If a man has never suffered from an accusing conscience, nor perceived any deformity in sin, he cannot understand nor believe the statements which the Bible gives of the corruption of the human heart. Our moral faculties must then be in right and healthful exercise, in order that we may have a correct belief of moral truths. Jesus saw in the vain-glorious feelings of the Jews, a bar to their belief of his doctrines; “How can ye believe,” says he, “who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh from God only?” John v. 44. How often, in our intercourse with the world, do we hear



it said, "that such a man cannot estimate the character of such another, that he cannot comprehend his feelings?" And it is so. There is great diversity in human characters and capacities. There is a fervour in the feelings of some, which colder spirits cannot conceive, and therefore cannot believe. Oh! what then shall we say of the highest impression which man can have of the character of God? What heart can conceive the fervour of that love wherewith he so loved the world, as to give for it His only-begotten Son? What notions of sin, or of justice, have we, that can enable us to receive an adequate impression of the necessity of the sacrifice of Christ, in order that the pardon of man might be reconciled with the honour of God? No created mind can receive a full impression of the Divine character,—the highest archangel cannot look on the cross of Christ, as God looks on it,—how much less can man, who is a worm! Perfect faith in a history of high moral excellence, supposes moral faculties in a high state of power and exercise; for no faculties except in that state are capable of receiving such an impression.

What then? Is faith the result of character, instead of being the cause and the former of character? It is both. The objects of faith do not create faculties in the mind, which had no previous existence there; but they call into action, and direct and strengthen those

which they find there. The greatest variety of colours presented to a blind man cannot give him sight : but if, they are presented to a man who sees, they will exercise his sight, and give him a power of discriminating their varieties, which is inconceivable to those who have not been trained to it. So also an estimable object presented to a mind destitute of moral feelings, cannot create esteem or love ; but if the faculty be there, though in a weak and languid state from want of exercise, its proper object will in some measure excite and call it forth, and by exercise strengthen it. This is the only way of correcting and strengthening our faculties, either intellectual or moral. If they have been allowed to lie dormant, their exciting causes must be presented to them—if they have been active, but directed to wrong objects, they must be brought in contact with their proper and legitimate objects. The impression made by these objects, may be at first very weak and imperfect, and such of necessity will also be the belief of them ; but by exercise, the faculties will gain their proper bent, and will increase in strength, and the faith which is attached to their impressions will keep pace with them. How can a feeling which has a wrong direction be turned into its proper channel, except by having a proper exciting object presented to it ? We cannot alter the course of a feeling, without presenting to it some other object

more attractive. The superior attraction of this object may not at first be felt, but it will produce some effect, it will act at least as a disturbing force, it will shake the supremacy of the former object, and prepare the way for its own more cordial reception upon the next occasion. Where we cannot use mechanical force, the only way that we have of operating upon steel filings is by a magnet—and if they are detained by magnetic attraction in the place from which we wish to remove them, all that we can do, is to find out and apply a stronger magnet. The filings cannot be addressed in any other way. So we cannot, as it were, lay hands upon our feelings, and force them in what directions we think fit; they do not feel any coercion of this kind: we must use magnetic influence; we must apply a more proper and a stronger exciting cause. The understanding of the true excellence of this new object increases by degrees as it is exercised, and faith along with it. Thus it was that “Abraham’s faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect,” James ii. 22. Abraham’s faith in the character of God was different at last, from what it was at first. Every view which had been given him of the Divine perfections, had tended to expand his capacities, to correct and strengthen his moral feelings, and thus to fit him for more true and more lively impressions of that character in future.

As he grew in holiness, he could better understand the meaning and excellence of the Divine holiness; and as he grew in love, he could form more adequate conceptions of the Divine love. And thus would his faith be as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The holy love of God is the attribute most glorified in the atonement. This is the crown; this gives its character to the whole work. The more polluted and depraved, therefore, a mind is, the less capable is it of understanding and believing the Gospel.

And yet the Gospel was sent into the world, that the polluted and depraved might be saved by the faith of it, both from the condemnation and the power of sin. And well is it fitted for their case. Even in the most polluted and the most depraved, there are feelings still remaining which, in the hour of sorrow or fear, may melt to the voice of kindness and compassion. There are in the store-house of Providence, events which will bring the stoutest heart to a stand, and force it to feel its weakness—and then the charge of guilt may refuse any longer to be despised, and the gracious invitations of an Almighty Father may not be disregarded. Besides, sin, though it misdirects, does not weaken self-love. Anguish, and doubt and fear, and sorrow and pain, enter the sinner's soul. And to these feelings are the glad tidings of the Gospel ad-

dressed. All the parts of Divine truth are linked together, so that if one part is received, there is a preparation of heart for the rest. They are not united merely as parts of an intellectual system, though they have this union, but they are united also by a sympathy between the feelings excited by the objects which the truth presents. Thus, if I believe that the sufferings and death of the incarnate Deity were required to expiate sin, and that he submitted to this for our sakes, my reason is prepared for the conclusion, no doubt, that sin is a very hateful and fearful thing; and this is the connexion of the two doctrines as parts of an intellectual system. But there is still a far more important connexion between the feelings produced by the two doctrines. If my mind is impressed by the love of Christ in dying for me, the sense of his overwhelming kindness and compassion will lay me low in the dust before him, and make me loath myself both as being the cause of his sufferings, and on account of the total inadequacy of my gratitude, in proportion to the favour bestowed on me. Even so also joy in the atonement, merely as the means of escape from misery, is blessed by the Spirit of God, to bring forth the fruit of holy love to the praise of the glory of his grace, in the hardest and the foulest heart. The joy of a free deliverance softens and expands the heart. It is thus prepared to look at the blood which was its

ransom, with tenderness and gratitude—and thus is it led to rejoice in the love of Him whose blood was shed. There are many entrances, through which the Spirit introduces his powerful weapon, some of them to human reason more likely than others; but where He works, there is success; and without His influence, the most probable means fail. We only know so much concerning the nature of that influence, as may humble us, and keep us in a continual state of dependence on Divine aid. We see thus far, however, concerning the mode in which it is applied, that God works upon our minds by the operation of the truth on those natural faculties which he has bestowed on us.

The man who is continually exercising his faith in those truths which he knows, is daily becoming fitter to receive other truths: whilst the man whose affections are directed to wrong objects, is daily becoming less susceptible of impressions from right objects, and is thus becoming more and more hardened in unbelief.

Let us suppose that an angel had been kept ignorant of the work of atonement until now, and that the Gospel were for the first time declared to him and to a hardened sinner together. Oh, what a difference would there be in their reception of it, and feelings from it! With what humble and grateful rapture would that holy being welcome and embrace this

new and glorious manifestation of his Father's character! As he dwelt and fed upon it, he would sensibly grow in love, and holiness, and happiness. He would feel no difficulty, no doubt on the subject; he would delight in God, with exceeding joy. And why would he be thus ready to receive it as soon as he heard it? Because his affections had already been exercised by, and formed upon, other manifestations of the Divine character; and though this last work excelled them in glory, yet it only carried into brighter display, principles which had already been adored and loved by the heavenly hosts. The same affections with which, from his creation, he had regarded God, and which had been strengthened by continual exercise, are addressed by the Gospel; they are only called into more intense action; they are already tuned to this new song, only their pitch is lower. But what reception does the sinner give it? Let each of our hearts answer, how often, how obstinately, we have rejected it. The angel was happy before; this new discovery only makes an addition to a happiness which was already great: but we, whose lawful inheritance was eternal misery, and whose only hope of having the darkness of hell exchanged for the light of heaven, lay in this Gospel,—we hear it with carelessness and indifference, perhaps with scorn and indignation;—and even if it has pleased God, of his abundant

compassion, to force upon us some sense of its excellency, oh how indolent have we been in the enjoyment of it! how cold and forgetful in the expressions of our gratitude for it! And why does this happen? What is the explanation of this miserable and pitiable folly? Our affections have been so habitually directed to objects different from and opposed to the character and will of God, that they scarcely feel the attraction of their proper objects when presented to them. There is, however, no other mode of recovery for a mind in that state, than the contemplation of these proper objects. If it feel its disease, it is prepared to receive the good tidings with joy, and to cry earnestly and importunately to Him, who can save, and will save, all who come to Him.

The affections of the angel's mind have been so habituated to excitement from their proper objects—the character of God, and his works and ways, as interpreted by Himself,—that they would feel no movement from the presence of an improper object. His heart is so full of God, that it rejects every thing opposed to Him : Whilst the hardened sinner's heart is scarcely stirred at all by the presence of a proper object for the affections, and is so full of self and sin, that it requires the hand of Omnipotence to force upon it the objects of eternity. The human mind is indeed so far like a mirror, that impressions can only



be made upon it by corresponding objects,—and that no effort of ours, without the instrumentality of these objects, can make the impressions ; but in this respect it differs from a mirror, that, by habit, it becomes increasingly susceptible of impressions from any class of objects. Observe the growth of avarice and ambition. Minds long habituated to receive impressions from the objects of these disordered affections, seem at last to yield themselves entirely to them, and to refuse all other excitement. The view of this law of our moral being, has something very striking and awful in it. Every thought, every wish, every action, is making us more accessible either to the invitations of heaven or the temptations of hell. The movements of our minds may be forgotten by us, but they have left traces behind them, which may affect our eternal destiny. They do not terminate in themselves—in their own rectitude, or their own sin ; they have strengthened some principle, and weakened its opposite. Think whether that principle forms a part of the character of heaven or the character of hell. If it be a part of the character of heaven, an advance has been made in overcoming the enmity of the heart ; and if it be a part of the character of hell, unbelief is more confirmed, because the mind is less open to impressions from the truth. The affections, when habitually misdirected, clothe the soul as with im-

penetrable armour against all assaults of the truth. It is this armour which Isaiah describes, when he predicts the rejection of Christ by the Jews ; “ Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and convert and be healed,” Isaiah vi. 10. This passage is quoted in the New Testament by St. John, who attributes the unbelief of the people to the state of mind here described, John xii. 39, 40.

It appears, then, that the belief of any one moral or spiritual truth operating on the mind, prepares it for the readier reception of any other, because it exercises the same class of affections, and thus increases their susceptibility of impressions from a farther revelation. It was to be expected, therefore, that those Jews who had received the truth communicated through their own dispensation, would welcome the doctrine of Christ ; and that those who did not believe in the spiritual sense of their own Scriptures, would reject the true Messiah when he appeared. Thus Simeon and Anna, and those to whom she spoke, and John the Baptist, and all who understood and believed in the spiritual nature of the Messiah’s kingdom, believed in Jesus Christ—whilst those whose affections had been unexercised by the spiritual character of God, and occupied by worldly expectations,

were prepared to reject him. Our Lord seems to refer to this distinction in the 10th chapter of John. Those whose affections had been rightly exercised by the truth already revealed, knew the voice of Christ whenever they heard it. They were his sheep. They were prepared to receive him, not merely by their belief in the prophecies relating to him, but by having the temper of their minds harmonized to the spirit of his doctrine. In the 16th verse of the chapter, he may either allude to those in the Gentile world, who had, by the teaching of the Spirit, received that truth which is revealed in the works and ways of God, and in the testimony of conscience, and had thus been prepared for greater light; or to those in general beyond the Jewish boundary, whose hearts should afterwards be opened to attend to the Gospel. In Acts xiii. 48, there appears to be a reference made to the distinction above mentioned. The translation does not give the meaning of the original. We surely are not to suppose that all the Gentiles in that place, who ever were to embrace the Gospel, did so at that time, and that their number was then summed and shut up. The spirit of the passage would require some such phrase as "bound towards," or "under orders for," or "prepared for" eternal life, substituted in place of "ordained." The meaning seems to be this: Those of the Gentiles who, by attending the Jewish

synagogue, had learned the doctrine of eternal life through an atonement, or who, without this advantage, had been convinced that they were sinners, and must be saved. if saved at all, by free grace, embraced the Gospel whenever they heard it, as the development, and fulfilment, and harmonizing explanation of those truths which they had already partially received. This view of the subject does not at all interfere with that most precious truth, that the work of Christ is a foundation of hope broad enough and strong enough for the chief of sinners, and that the spiritual medicine of the Gospel is adequate to the cure of the most desperate moral maladies. We daily see instances of the Gospel being pertinaciously rejected by those whose amiable affections would lead us to anticipate for it a very different reception; as we often find it embraced by those whose tone of mind seemed most averse to it. And we are hence taught to look to the great Disposer of hearts. But still there is a certain fitness in some minds for the reception of the Gospel, beyond what there is in others. Thus a conviction of sin naturally prepares the way to receive, with eagerness, the good news of forgiveness. A conviction of the insufficiency of this world to give permanent happiness, is certainly a preparation of mind for entertaining a higher hope. In these cases the truth has been *partially* received already; and the affections

exercised even by a fragment of the Divine will; are prepared to receive impressions from other manifestations of it. We may, with humble confidence, trust to the Divine promise, "that those who seek shall find," as an encouragement to us in our search after more spiritual light; and we may have this confidence confirmed, when we consider the provision which has been made in the constitution of our minds for its fulfilment. The man who walks faithfully under the influence of one moral truth, becomes necessarily more qualified for receiving a farther measure of truth. For it is the will and appointment of God, that by faithful action, and the steady exercise of the affections, under the influence of known truth, our capacity for moral knowledge, and consequently for believing moral truth, should be expanded. No one is justified in sitting still, until he knows more. Let present duty be influenced by the truth which is at present known. But then it must be a *truth*; for otherwise the principles opposed to the Gospel are exercised and strengthened by it. A man who performs the external duties of life strictly, who is a liberal contributor to the necessities of others, and who attends Divine ordinances regularly, with the expectation expressed or understood of thus creating to himself a claim on the favour of God, and a plea for the pardon of past sins, is hourly strengthening a principle in the most direct

opposition to the cross of Christ, and is hourly becoming more inaccessible to the glad tidings of salvation. It is quite absurd to recommend to such a man to go on in his course, with the hope that his faithful walking will be rewarded by farther light. The farther he advances on that road, so much the deeper is he involved in condemnation and darkness, and the more unlikely is it that he will ever return.

The truths which *must* be received, with respect to man, are his guilt and helplessness; and with respect to God, are his holiness and his mercy. The man who believes in these truths, perhaps has not the joy of the Gospel, but he believes in the elements of the Gospel; and when his affections are exercised by them, they are exercised in conformity with the spirit of the Gospel. But the Gospel itself is as intelligible as these its elements, and as intelligible also as any precept in the moral law. Its address to our natural principle of self-preservation is surely simpler than any moral exhortation can be—and the manifestation of the love of God, and of his abhorrence of sin, in the cross of Christ, is surely as intelligible as the commandment to love God, or the declaration that “cursed is every one who continueth not in all the words of the law to do them.” Why then may not the Gospel be preached, as well as the law, upon any occasion? There is something very inconsistent with reason in supposing, that

abstract perceptive moral truths can be more intelligible, or more easily received, than the same moral truths when exemplified in the Gospel history. The same faculties qualify us for receiving impressions from both. There is, however, a difference in the impressions made in these two ways. The impression received from the *precept*, is necessarily a cold, and joyless, and lifeless impression, because its object addresses merely the sense of duty. Whilst the Gospel, not only addresses the sense of duty, but makes an irresistible appeal to every feeling of self-love, and every principle of gratitude and generosity. And let *this also* be remembered, that "It is by "grace we are saved, *through faith*."

Now, it is very possible that a man may be in a state of confirmed hardness, and darkness and unbelief, and yet have what may appear to himself and his friends very clear views of the Gospel. It has been already frequently repeated, that although moral actions are truly understood and believed only when there is an impression on the mind significant of the moral principle contained in them, yet their external form can be believed and talked about, when their principle is not at all perceived. Thus the outward form of the facts of the Christian history may be believed implicitly; and yet if the love of God is not perceived, and the freeness and undeservedness of the redemption through His Son,—the Gospel is not believed. But if actions

are liable in this way to misinterpretation, words are even more so. A man may say that he believes the history of the Saviour, and that he receives it as a manifestation of the love of God, without being in the slightest degree hypocritical, and yet he may not be a believer. Love is a word symbolical of a particular state of feeling. A meaning therefore must be attached to it by every individual corresponding to his own state of feeling. If his state of feeling is disordered, of course the meaning attached to this word will be a wrong one. But it often happens that we do not attach to our words even such meanings as our minds are capable of attaching to them. The meaning is perhaps a complex idea, and we cannot allow ourselves time to receive a full impression of it; whereas the word is short and convenient; and perfectly answers all purposes of conversation or reasoning. We accordingly use the word, and leave the meaning for another occasion. Now the Gospel is addressed not to our conversational or argumentative powers, but to our moral principles and natural feelings; and therefore it is not really received, unless the impression of its moral meaning is actually made on the mind. Oh, the waters that proceed from this fountain are deadly waters, and many there are who drink thereat! Philosophical thinking minds are very apt, unconsciously, to fall into this error, especially such as fill the of-



fice of religious teachers, and most difficult it is to escape from its paralysing habit and influence. Who is there, even amongst serious thinkers, that does not often feel horrified at the lightness and unmovedness with which he can speak or write that name which represents the eternal Majesty of heaven, in conversation called religious, or in private study called theological ! Could indifference, or improper warmth, or a vain desire of victory, find place in a mind, to which the idea of such an object as God was really present ? Impossible—and yet how often are such feelings in the mind, when that word is in the mouth ! It is evident in such a case that the great *thing* is not believed at the time. What is the impression on the mind ? None corresponding to the mighty object assuredly ; the word only has impressed the mind as a logical datum. It is no doubt most convenient for the intercourse of life, and for the purposes of conversation and reasoning, to have such symbolical abbreviations to represent our ideas ; but it is a dearly bought convenience, if it cheats us out of the reality of heaven, by enabling us to converse about it, without thinking or feeling what it is.

What wonderful love was that which brought Christ from heaven to earth to die for sinners ? Do we think of this wonder and feel it at all ? or when we speak of it even ? He is at this moment looking into our hearts.

Oh what indifferéce he sees ! But I do not talk of gratitude ; I ask, is there in our minds even an *idea* of Christ's love every time that we speak its name ? Have we an impression corresponding to the fact, that had it not been for that love, we should all be within a few hours of eternal damnation ? Have we this impression when we speak of his atonement ?

Let the reader pause here and ask himself, how much of his religion is of this kind—how far his faith is conversant with words, and how far with things—how far it rests in mere symbols, and how far it embraces the spirit and meaning. What effect has your faith on your heart and conduct ? If your faith is conversant with the true things of the Gospel, your heart will be growing in humble and holy peace, and your conduct in conformity to the whole will of God. If these effects do not result from your faith, look again at the Gospel, for you have not yet come in contact with it. A poor, ignorant, naked savage, who knows and feels so much as this, that he is a sinner, that God hates sin and yet has mercy on the sinner, knows and believes more of the Gospel, than the most acute and most orthodox theologian, whose heart has never been touched by the love of God.

No ; it is impossible really to have clear views of the Gospel, whilst the affections are muddy. What adequate impression can an

impure mind have of the holy love of God? Yet this is the chief attribute of God revealed in the Gospel. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The blessing here mentioned is not an arbitrary reward, irrespective of the character, to which it is promised. There is a connexion between purity of heart and communion with God on earth, as well as the beatific vision hereafter. The purest heart has the most correct faith, because it is susceptible of the truest impressions from holy love. It knows best what holy love means, and therefore it can believe best. Clear views of the Gospel do not consist in having our logical lines all drawn accurately from premises to conclusion, but in having distinct and vivid impressions of the moral facts of the Gospel, in all their meaning, and all their importance, accompanied with the strong conviction of their independent reality. But how is purity of heart to be attained? It can only be attained by faith, Acts xv. 9. So then it may be answered we cannot believe without purity of heart, and yet we can only have our hearts purified by believing. There is, however, no contradiction here. It is evident that we cannot believe in pure and holy love, unless we know what it is; and our knowledge of this must be proportioned to the purity and strength of our own feelings. And yet these feelings can only be purified and strengthened by being

directed to pure objects, and by being much exercised by them. The Gospel is suited to man. He has affections and principles corresponding to every address contained in it, although, from corruption and habitual misdirection, they may be to a great degree, unmoved by these addresses. There is, however, no other way of regenerating these misdirected affections, but by bringing them in contact with their proper objects. There is no other resource,—we have no other means of operating on them. They retain to the last somewhat of their natural susceptibility of impressions from their proper objects, and therefore they ought to be assailed through these objects. And we have seen that the first address of the Gospel is to a principle, which continues strong and vivacious in the midst of spiritual corruption and death, the instinctive desire of self-preservation and happiness. Whilst, therefore, it is vain to expect really clear views of Gospel truth in an unholy mind, it is equally hopeless to attempt the cultivation of holy affections in any other way than by exercising faith on the true character of God. These are two important errors, and their chief danger arises from their having so much of truth connected with them. There is an aphorism quoted by that holy and heavenly-minded man Archbishop Leighton, but from what author I do not recollect, which, under the form of paradox, contains

the affections towards the truth, and so faith retrogrades. Wilful sin blinds the understanding, and confirms the affections in their wrong bent, and in their insensibility to the Gospel, and so faith seems to die. The mercy of God, by the visitations of providence and the strivings of the Spirit, may keep the spark from utter extinction; but there is little progress made, little conformity to the will of God, and little enjoyment of his presence and favour. But when a man feels his danger, and perceives the necessity of salvation in its full urgency, he is prepared to yield to the Gospel mould; he is convinced that his eternal all rests on this truth; he therefore clings to it, and the closeness of his grasp ensures the depth and truth of the impression on his heart.

We may believe that the spirit of an infant early removed from this world, a trophy of the cross, and carried to heaven, will be at once impressed by the beauties and glories of the Divine character, and conformed to the same image by the knowledge of Him who is the spirit and meaning of the Gospel. But even in heaven there must be a progressive advancement. Greater knowledge of God will produce greater resemblance to him, and greater resemblance to him will increase the capacity of knowing him. It is the same on earth. A free and general pardon is proclaimed from heaven to the sinful children of

men; but it is conveyed through the blood of atonement, a channel which displays all the perfections of God. The heart of man is naturally opposed to the holiness of the Divine character; and therefore until that character is seen to be in truth our only safety, our only sure happiness for time and eternity, we reject the proclamation. As soon, however, as we feel our danger and misery, and see the safety and happiness guaranteed in the Divine character, as displayed in the cross of Christ, we listen to the proclamation with joy, and we come at the same time under the shade of its protection, and under the operation of its sanctifying power. And then the work of grace advances, just in proportion to the earnestness and constancy with which we cleave to and abide in the truth. We see, then, that as the mind dwells on this great theme, and as the affections are more exercised by its wonders, there will be a gradual dilation of the whole moral system—that lighter and feebler impressions will give place to deeper and stronger—that the external symbols of words and actions will become more and more identified with the mighty realities of God and eternity—that religion, instead of being an interrupted seeking after God, will become an unbroken communion with him, a conformity to his image, and a participation of his joy. The lower orders of intelligent beings will thus be gradually pressing

upwards in the scale of spiritual excellence, and filling the places which have been just left by the higher—and the whole family of God, led by this glorious light, will through eternity be advancing nearer to their Father.

We shall be saved from much perplexity and error in our inquiries into the nature and exercise of faith, by keeping in mind what is its design or end. We are not commanded to believe merely for the sake of believing, or to show our ready submission to the will of God ; but because the objects which are revealed to us for our belief, have a natural tendency to produce a most important and blessed change on our happiness and our characters. Every object which is believed by us operates on our characters according to its own nature. If therefore we have taken a wrong view of revelation, that wrong view will operate upon us, and produce a bad effect on our characters. This shows the importance of a correct knowledge of the truth contained in revelation. A man's character is formed by his beliefs. Let us suppose a person of good natural affections to have his mind occupied continually by the history of an injurious fraud which he believes to have been practised against him, on some occasion. It is impossible that he can escape being miserable, and becoming morally depraved. His bad passions, by being constantly excited, must grow in strength and in susceptibility of

similar impressions, and his happier affections, by being unexercised, must fade and die. Let us again suppose a man with less amiable natural qualities, whose life or fortune had been at one time saved by the self-sacrificing generosity of a friend. If this event makes such an impression on him, as to be more present to his thoughts than any other, it cannot fail of softening and improving his character, and increasing his happiness. —His good affections are thus continually exercised, and must therefore be continually gaining strength, whilst bad passions are at the same time displaced. Of those who have acquired the character of misanthropes, probably nine out of ten, have, like Timon, been men of generous dispositions, who, having been deceived in friendship, have ever after looked on fair professions as the symbols of dishonest intentions. Their feelings of contempt and hatred, and wounded pride, being thus continually exercised by this unfortunate belief, the whole frame of their character has been ruined, and their peace of mind destroyed. And it is possible that, if we could look into the hearts of men and trace their history, we might find some of the brightest examples of benevolence amongst those whose natural dispositions were most opposite to it, but who had allowed the history of the Redeemer's love so to abide in them, that it had softened and changed their



hearts, and healed their diseased affections.

Any circumstance to which we attach much importance, is naturally much present to our minds. And on this point there is as great room for deception, as on any other. I have perhaps been unfortunate, or I have been injured, and I am distressed by it ; but is this matter really of that importance which it assumes in my mind ? I may have been correctly informed in all the particulars of this injury, which has been committed against me. I may not overrate the malice, or the fraud, or the baseness of the perpetrators. I therefore do not believe so far what is false. Yet I may attach a false importance to it. And then neither can my impression of the act be a just impression, nor my belief of it a correct belief. This is a question which we have often occasion to ask ourselves in the course of this world's events, and this is a judgment and a conclusion to which unbiased reason must often conduct us. But when we come to speak of eternal things, the question must be put in another form. Do I attach to this matter the importance which really belongs to it ? Its importance I cannot but admit to be infinite ; my all depends upon it for ever ; and yet it takes but slight hold of my mind. Surely then I do not understand its importance ; and if so, I cannot believe its importance. I do not believe the thing as it is.

Our minds receive an influence from every thing by which they are occupied, and according to the degree in which they are occupied by it, and this degree is determined by the importance which our feelings attribute to it. If then the importance of the Gospel is believed, it will occupy the mind much; and if it does so, it will keep the affections in healthy exercise, and a right direction. If it does not occupy our minds, its importance is not seen, and therefore its real nature is not believed. Objects assume importance in our minds, according to the relation which they bear to the general bent of our affections. Thus any event which promises either to increase or diminish his wealth, assumes great importance in the mind of an avaricious man. The small importance, therefore, which is often attached to the Gospel, by those who may even have heard and read much about it, and profess to believe in it, arises from the circumstance of their affections having an opposite bent. There is something in the Gospel, and in the holy character of Him whose message it is, from which they shrink. No doubt this proceeds from their ignorance that happiness is a quality of holiness; but this ignorance is not a guiltless ignorance, nor is the unbelief connected with it a guiltless unbelief. They are the consequences of unholiness of heart. An unholy heart hates holiness, and *therefore* is blind to its excellence,

and will not believe that happiness is inseparable from it. Our unbelief of the Gospel, then, and of its importance, ought not to be regarded as an act for which we can never be morally accountable, nor should it be spoken of as a mere misfortune. There is a moral guilt attached to it. It arises from a discordance between the moral state of our minds, and the character of God which is exhibited in the Gospel. It arises from the depravity of our affections. And this depravity it is, which makes the work of the Spirit necessary. The things concerning Christ must be taken by the Spirit and shown to the heart, and brought in contact with the affections, and kept there, before their inestimable preciousness can be felt or believed. But this depravity of our affections, and our absolute need of Divine assistance, are no excuses for unbelief. Sin consists in this depravity. If a man were guiltless because he acted under the influence of a strong and overbearing moral depravity, then the more depraved we were, the less guilty we should be. There is a great difference between moral necessity and natural necessity. We never say that a blind man ought to see, because we know that he lies under a natural inability; but we say that an unfeeling man ought to feel, and that an implacable man ought to forgive and forget injuries, because he lies under no natural disability to do so, but only under the

moral disability of his own corrupt heart, which is the very thing which constitutes his culpability. God loves right so perfectly, that he cannot sin; he lies under the necessity of his own moral attributes to do always what is good, and in this moral necessity does his infinite excellence consist. A sinner loves sin so well, that he cannot but sin; and in this moral necessity does his culpability consist. This moral necessity to do evil is formed by the misdirection of the affections to improper objects, and it becomes stronger and stronger by every act in subordination to it. It is the mark of perdition upon the soul. But how is this fearful barrier to be broken down? By no other means is it possible, but by bringing the affections into contact with the high and holy objects of eternity. This is the true philosopher's stone, which converts the iron fetters of sin, into a golden chain of love, binding the heart to God and heaven. The most hardened sinner has yet some conscience left. He knows that all is not quite right, and hence he has occasional fears that all is not quite safe. This sense of sin, and these fears, if he allows them to operate on his mind, would lead him to the Gospel, and there would he find a cure. Every man can judge tolerably well for another, how he ought to act or feel in particular circumstances; and this same judgment must sometimes take cognizance of his own con-

duct and feelings. Even that very self-love which so often gives a wrong direction to our conduct, shows us what is due to others, by its demands in our own favour. Moral ignorance, therefore, is never innocent ; though it is more or less aggravated according to the opportunities of moral knowledge which have been neglected. A man who rejects the Gospel when it is presented to him in its truth and simplicity, is in a very different situation from a man who has either never heard it at all, or has heard it accompanied by absurd superstitions. The one has fairly been confronted by a message of holy love, and what he cannot help suspecting to have some strong claim upon his attention and regards, and he has turned his back upon it. This of course gives an additional firmness and acrimony to the opposition which his mind feels for it. Its presence in some degree rebuked him, and this he cannot suffer without irritation. The others, who never heard the Gospel at all, or never heard it intelligibly, cannot have the same acrimony of opposition to it. Besides, they may have learned, perhaps, by the teaching of the Spirit, that truth concerning the Divine character which is revealed in the testimony of conscience, and in the works of creation and providence ; and in this case, they would receive the Gospel if they heard it ; for *true natural religion is elementary Christianity.*

The perception of the importance of the Gospel is not only essential to the correctness of our knowledge and belief of it, but it is necessary also in order to the accomplishment of its great design in our hearts. Unless the truth is much present to our affections, unless it abides in us, it cannot influence our characters. And unless we feel its importance, it will not abide in us. That Christianity is not worthy of the name which just chooses a particular day in the week, or a particular hour in the day, for itself, and leaves the rest of the time and the duties of life to the influence of other principles. It ought to be in us as a well of water springing up unto eternal life; its joy, its hope, its love, should be ever cheering the heart, purifying the affections, and stimulating the conduct. It ought to be the root, from which the duties of life, in all their branches, should derive their life and vigour. The great truths of revelation should be ever present with us, that we may be assimilated to their principles, and preserved from opposite impressions. We are invited to walk with God, to walk in the light of his countenance, to take him for our portion, and hiding-place, and exceeding joy, and under the shadow of his wings to make our refuge until all calamities be overpast. He has been pleased to illustrate his relation to us by all the most endearing ties of nature, that we may more easily and constantly realize his

presence. He has presented himself even to our senses, clothed in our nature, walking and conversing as a man amongst men, fulfilling all the offices and suffering all the sorrows of life, that we might think of him not only without terror and strangeness, but even with respectful confidence and intimacy. In the work of atonement, he has given a tangible form to the high attributes of Deity—he has made them there stand forth before our eyes in the substantial reality of living action, and at the same time in all their grandeur and loveliness,—he has rendered them intelligible to our understandings, without lowering their dignity,—he has fitted them to address the feelings of human nature, whilst they call forth the praise and the rapture of angels who surround the throne. And in the language of his word, in its rich and beautiful variety of parables and allegories, and poetical allusions, what is the object in nature, which has not been employed to explain and illustrate his truth? He has thus, so to speak, written his name upon every thing that surrounds us. And are they not all his works? Ought they not to declare his glory? God hath thus enveloped us with his glory,—he hath made himself our dwelling-place—and all this, that we may feed upon his love, that we may be conformed to his likeness, and that we may enter into his joy. And is it possible for us, in such circumstances, to

forget God? He even embitters other things that we may be drawn to himself—he takes away an earthly friend, that we may be led to a Friend from whom nothing can separate us—our hopes are blasted here, that we may learn to plant them in a soil where nothing dies—he arms sin with remorse, that we may be persuaded that it is a bitter thing to depart from God. If it were possible to believe in the Gospel without remembering it, faith would be of no use to us; but the belief of its importance fixes it in the heart. The moral effects of it on the character, constitute the great reason of its being urged on our belief. We are not to think that pardon is created by believing the Gospel, as if faith were the ground of forgiveness. No; the Gospel itself is the proclamation of pardon through the perfect atonement of Christ, and it is the belief of the all-sufficiency of this proclaimed ground of pardon remaining in the memory, and operating on the heart, which makes meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. The Apostle Peter accordingly, in his second epistle, stirs up the pure minds of Christians by way of remembrance, and presses upon their attention truths with which he knew they were acquainted. In the 9th verse of the 1st chapter, he ascribes the deficiency in Christian virtues and graces, to a forgetfulness of the atonement, that great work in the belief of which they had before found deli-



verance from guilt. "He that lacks these things is blind, shutting his eyes, and forgetting that by which he was formerly washed from his sins." The knowledge of the atonement it was, which first produced these qualities in the heart, and it is the continued remembrance of the atonement which alone can keep them in life, and strengthen and expand them. All things pertaining to life and godliness, he says, are given to us in the knowledge of him who hath called us to glory and virtue. And hence when we forget him, we lose the things which pertain to life and godliness.

In the Epistle to Titus, ii. 11, it is said, that "the grace or forgiving mercy of God, that bringeth salvation or a cure, hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." Now the forgiving mercy of God is not a precept; it does not produce these effects by authority, but by its natural influence it moulds the character into this form. But it can only do so whilst it is remembered. In the next chapter of the same Epistle, Paul exhorts Titus to inculcate upon the Cretans an attention to the relative duties of life; and then, as if to remove his despondency of success, he reminds him, that all the most advanced Christians had been themselves but a short time before in a state of enmity to

God and man, and that they had been delivered from this state only by the knowledge of the kindness and love of God our Saviour. Then in the 8th verse, "This is a faithful saying, and these doctrines (of free grace, contained in the four preceding verses) I will that thou affirm constantly, in order that they who have believed God in this matter, may be careful to maintain good works;" or, in order that the same good effects which have been produced in us by the belief of this gospel, may also be produced in them. "These doctrines are good and profitable in their effects on the characters of men. But avoid doctrines of a different description, foolish questions and genealogies, and contentions and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain; they can have no salutary effect upon the character." In our English translation, "these things," in the last clause of the 8th verse, seem to refer to the good works mentioned immediately before; but this sense is not consistent with the context. The "good and profitable" things of the 8th verse, are opposed evidently to the "unprofitable and vain" things of the following verse. And what are these unprofitable and vain things? Not bad works, which they must have been, had the other been good works; but foolish questions and genealogies, and contentions

and strivings about the law ; all of them disputes about doctrine, which indicates that the other things are doctrines also, but differing from them in their tendency and importance. Besides, the tenor of the Apostle's reasoning through the chapter requires this interpretation. Titus was appointed to the pastoral charge of a people, among whom there were many things to be reprehended and "rebuked sharply." But in the midst of these discouragements, Paul cheers him by displaying the power and efficacy of that Gospel which he was commissioned to teach. He reminds him of their own former state and character, and of the change which had been produced in them, by the knowledge of the free grace of God through Christ Jesus. Knowing then and feeling that it was this great truth alone which made you a friend and a servant of God, from being his enemy, cease not continually to inculcate it upon the Cretans, and be assured that wherever it is received it will produce the same effects. It is the confidence which I have in its salutary tendency, which makes me prize it, and preach it, and urge others to preach it. And it is the conviction that disputes about the observance of Jewish rites, and speculative and unpractical arguments upon religious subjects, cannot, in the nature of things, produce any good effects upon the character ; which makes me avoid

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them myself, and desirous that you should do so too. If I thought that such questions could purify the heart, I should propose them in every assembly; but their tendency is to irritate and darken, and not, like the doctrine of the cross, to enlighten, and purify, and tranquillize.

We have thus a simple scriptural test, by which we may try all the views and interpretations of Christian doctrine. Are they good and profitable in their influence on the heart and conduct? If they have not this tendency, if the impressions naturally made by them are not of this description, we may be assured that we have mistaken the doctrine.

Thus if the view which we take of the doctrine of election, or a particular providence, be such a one as leads us to be negligent in our callings, or to consider ourselves free from moral responsibility, we may be sure that this is a wrong view, because it cannot be good or profitable to the characters of men.

The doctrine of election is just another name for the doctrine of free grace. It teaches that all men are under deserved condemnation, and therefore can have no claim on God for pardon; and that this, and all other mercies, are the gifts of his *own free bounty and choice*. It thus teaches us humility and gratitude, by impressing us with

the conviction that we are debtors to God's unmerited bounty, not only for the gift of Christ and the knowledge of it, but also for the influence of the Spirit which inclines our hearts to accept it.

The doctrine of a particular providence teaches, that the same God who gave his Son to save us, orders every event in our lot. The belief of this will dispel worldly fears and anxieties, and inspire confidence, and impress with a continued sense of the Divine presence.

It is possible that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints should be so perverted by the corruption of human nature, as to lead to indolent security, and unwatchful habits. But this is not the doctrine of the Bible. The true doctrine is, that as it was God who first opened the eyes of sinners to the glory of the truth, so their continuance in the truth requires and receives the same almighty support to maintain it. It is not in their title to heaven, as distinct from the path to heaven, that they are maintained. No; they "are kept by the the power of God, *through faith* unto salvation." This doctrine then really leads to humble dependance on God, as the only support of our weakness; and to vigilance, from the knowledge that, when we are not actually living by faith, we are out of that way, in which believers are kept by the power of God unto salvation. The reality of

our faith is proved only by our perseverance ; if we do not persevere, we are not saints.

Any view of the doctrine of the atonement which can make us fearless or careless of sinning must be a wrong view, because it is not good nor profitable to men. That blessed doctrine declares sin pardoned, not because it is overlooked or winked at, but because the weight of its condemnation has been sustained on our behalf by our elder Brother and Representative. This makes sin hateful, by connecting it with the blood of our best Friend.

There are many persons who may be said rather to believe in an ecclesiastical polity, than in the doctrines of the Bible. In such cases the impression must be similar to that which is produced by political partizanship in the governments of this world. And there are some whose faith extends to higher things, who yet attach too much weight to externals.

Any view of subjects that may be believed or disbelieved without affecting our faith in the atonement, which can produce a coldness or unkindness between those who rest on the atonement, and live by the faith of it, must be a wrong view, because it mars that character of love which Christ declares to be the badge of his people. Such a view interferes with the doctrine of the atonement. Love to Christ, as the exclusive hope and the compassionate all-sufficient friend of lost sinners, is

the life-blood of the Christian family ; and wherever it flows, it carries along with it, relationship to Christ, and a claim on the affection of those who call themselves his. What is a name or a sect that it should divide those who are to live together in heaven through eternity, and who here love the same Lord, and who have been washed in the same blood, and drink of the same river of the water of life, and have access through the same Mediator by the same Spirit unto the Father ! This is a very serious consideration. It touches on that final sentence which shall be pronounced on the sheep and the goats : “ Come ye blessed ;” why blessed ? “ In as much as ye did it to one of the least of these *my brethren*, ye did it unto *me*.” “ Depart ye cursed ;” and why cursed ? “ In as much as ye did it not to one of the least of *these*, ye did it not to *me*.” It is not a general benevolence that is talked of here ; no, it is love to Christ exerting itself in kindness, and acts of kindness to his brethren for his sake. This is the grand and pre-eminent feature of the Christian character. Its presence, is the seal of heaven on the soul ; its absence, is the exclusion from heaven. We should take heed to ourselves ; for any flaw in this respect, marks a corresponding flaw in our Christian faith. The importance of the blood of Christ is not rightly perceived,

if it does not quench these petty animosities. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. An undue importance attached to inferior points, is surely not good nor profitable to men.

We take a wrong view of the Gospel if we suppose, that any moral qualifications whatever, are required on our part, to fit us for believing on Christ unto salvation. No one will ask supply without a sense of need; that is not a necessary qualification, but an exciting cause. A man will not ask for food unless he feels hungry, but he *has full liberty* to ask it without feeling hungry. So also no one will look to Christ for happiness, unless he is in some degree sensible of wretchedness; nor for pardon, unless he is in some degree convinced of his guilt. But these are only exciting causes, not qualifications. In the same way, no one will come without the teaching and leading of the Holy Spirit; but this is not a necessary qualification either, but only an exciting cause. That is to say, no one is commanded to delay believing on Christ, until he is influenced by the Spirit; on the contrary, the command to repent and believe the Gospel is universal; which proves that it is in the natural power of all men to do so, and that their inability is a moral, and therefore a criminal inability. The ground on which pardon is proclaimed through Christ,



is a thing independent altogether of our believing in it, because it is firm and sufficient in itself whether we believe in it or not. The sentence has been already executed on the Surety, and the prison-door has been thrown open; but if we refuse to come out, we exclude ourselves from the benefit of it. The Sun of mercy is risen with healing in his beams, but if we will not open our eyes, we may not know that he is risen. As soon, however, as we open our eyes, we know that it is light; and as soon as we understand and believe the Gospel, we know that we are pardoned. Such is the nature of this revelation, that he who is taught its true glory must be convinced that God had never unfolded it, had he not designed to save all who come to the knowledge of it. The promise of heaven confirms this view of the grand object of the work of the Saviour. Many clog the freeness of the Gospel, from the fear of antinomianism; but this is itself a most dangerous species of antinomianism. The law of God is written in the heart by no other instrument, but the free mercy of the Gospel. The pardon has been proclaimed simply, in order that the power and influence of sin may be overcome; we are therefore falsifying the record, and undoing its purpose, if we teach men to cast off their sins as a preparatory work previous to believing, and in order that

they may accept of the pardon. The command to "Repent and believe," means nothing more than that we should change our former views for those which the Gospel presents to us. Repentance means a change of mind, and therefore it necessarily accompanies a new belief. When we take new views, we *must* make a change, *we must* leave our old ones. We may say, "Arise and depart," though we knew that the person cannot depart without arising. But the real sorrow of the heart, on account of sin, can arise only from the sense of the amazing contrast between the subduing and overwhelming mercy of God and our unworthiness. It is when we look on him whom we have pierced, that we mourn truly; and it is when we know that God is pacified towards us, for all that we have done, that we remember and are confounded, Zech. xii. 10. Ezek. xvi. 63. When the Lord said to Peter, "lovest thou me?" he could answer that he did, and could appeal to his knowledge of the secrets of the heart for the truth of what he said; and it was this love which made him weep bitterly, when his Master's eye caught his, after he had denied him. We may, without faith in Christ, regard the consequences of sin with dislike and apprehension; and we may even feel it to be a pollution to the dignity of our nature; but our hearts can never loath it for its own

sake, until we see it connected with the blood of him who loved us and gave himself for us. It is not health, but disease, that we carry to the physician; and it is not any moral good, but sin and sorrow, that we must carry to the Saviour. It seems to have been the purpose of God, in adapting the first appeal of the Gospel to the mere natural sense of misery, and the instinctive craving after happiness, to make it impossible to attach any merit to faith, beyond what is attached to the desire a child feels for its mother's milk.

The absolute freeness of grace must be preached, in order to make the Gospel good and profitable to men. If man is required to bring any thing to the Saviour, he is not utterly lost, he has something to bring; or, in other words, sin is not so very sinful, and man hath whereof to glory even before God. The more freely grace is proclaimed, the more deeply sin is condemned; and it is the belief of having much forgiven, that compels the heart to love much. Love therefore, which is the fulfilling of the law, has its source in free grace. Oh the presumptuous vanity of men, who would dream of inventing a defence for the interests of holiness, better and securer than that which God himself has appointed! That very parable which I have quoted from the conclusion of the 7th chapter of Luke, is answer sufficient to all objections

against the doctrine of grace, in point both of fact and of argument. This is a position which cannot be pressed too much. It is no less strong in reason than in revelation, and its wisdom is as demonstrable on the acknowledged principles of the human mind, as the fact of its existence in the Bible is demonstrable on the acknowledged principles of fair interpretation. I have already touched on it before, and I shall again before I conclude this Essay. In the mean time, I shall endeavour to describe some other counterfeits of the faith of the Gospel.

It is possible to believe not only in the facts, but also in the system of Christianity as a philosophical theory, and yet be destitute of faith in the truth. There is something very striking in the relative suitability which exists between the susceptibility of the human mind to receive certain impressions, and the power of Christian truth to make an impression; and it is conceivable that a man may be captivated by this intellectual and moral harmony, and take much pleasure in tracing it through all its detail, and yet derive no more profit from it, than from the examination of any curious piece of material mechanism. This can be easily explained. The object of his belief is not the Gospel itself, but the adaptation of the Gospel to its purpose. This is the shape which the

idea of the Gospel assumes in his mind, and from this he derives his impression of it. He avows his belief of the facts contained in the sacred history, and he distinctly perceives the moral qualities manifested in them; but he does not consider them as things existing by themselves, and independent of all human reasoning upon them. He is occupied by the metaphysics of religion as the formalist is occupied by the ceremonies. He considers the facts and principles of revelation simply in their philosophical relation to those feelings which they address in human nature; he is therefore impressed not with the condescending goodness of God, but with the skill which appears in the adaptation of the manifestation of that goodness, to the moral defects of man. A philosophical critic would have had much delight in remarking the skill with which Demosthenes selected his topics and arguments, so as to excite those feelings in his audience which were favourable to his own cause; but this philosophical delight left his passions unmoved, and his conduct uninfluenced. It was the orator's wish to gain his cause, and this he could only do by moving the affections and convincing the judgment of the Athenians. But the affections could not be moved, nor the judgment convinced, unless his statements and arguments were received as substantial truth in themselves, altogether inde-

pendent of philosophical relation and harmony. Had he delivered a critical analysis of his famous oration for the crown, instead of the oration itself, it is probable that he, and not Eschines, would have been exiled. It is proper that this beautiful relation should be seen and admired; but if it comes to be the prominent object of belief, the great truth of Christianity is unbeliev'd. A teacher of religion, who should fill his discourses with the delineation of this relation, might be a very entertaining and interesting preacher, but it is probable that he would not make many converts to Christianity. Our affections are excited by having corresponding objects presented to them, not by observing that there does exist such a relation between the affections and their objects. A man under the sentence of death may well and naturally rejoice when he hears that he is pardoned; but it will be no consolation to him to be informed, that there is a natural connexion between receiving a pardon in such circumstances and rejoicing. As the blood flowed no better through Hervey's veins than it does through the veins of many who never heard of the theory of circulation; so an acquaintance with the relation which subsists between moral impressions and their exciting causes does not give the philosopher any advantage, in point of moral susceptibility, over the peasant who never heard of such a relation.

As it is possible to believe in the philosophy of the Bible, without believing in its substantial truth ; it is also possible to believe in its poetry, without any saving consequences. There is much high poetry in the Bible. There is a sublime in the God set forth in it, altogether unrivalled ; there is a strange and beautiful combination of overwhelming omnipotence, and the sweetest tenderness ; there is an intimacy of union and endearment spoken of between this God and his creatures, which, when stript of all that is offensive to nature, may take a strong hold of the imaginative faculties, and give a high species of enjoyment to the mind. This enjoyment is of the same kind as that which a finely strung mind derives from the treasures of Milton's genius. The truth of the Gospel is not in this case the object of belief. The love and justice of God, manifested in the cross, have not impressed the mind—for their impression could only be joy, and gratitude, and awe. Alas, that a pleasing reverie should ever be mistaken for the counterpart of the Divine character in the heart of man ! The person whom I am supposing, believes in the simplicity, and beauty, and awful magnificence of the revealed system of religion, and in the touching propriety of the form under which it has been communicated. But he does not understand it as a thing on which the alternative

of his own happiness, or misery through eternity depends. He does not understand it as exhibiting to him the character of that Being who deals out to him every breath that he draws, and appoints for him every event which he meets in the race of his existence ; who surrounds him continually, and from whose enveloping presence he can never retire himself for an instant through eternity ; who marks every passing thought and dawning desire, and who will for all these bring him one day into judgment ; he does not understand the Gospel as a message from heaven, inviting him, through the atonement of Christ, to approach this great Being as a gracious father, from whose love nothing but his own obstinate apostacy can separate him ; who has promised to make all things work together for good to his children ; and who, by this message of mercy, has converted the appalling attributes of his infinite nature into reasons of filial confidence. Unless the history of the past facts of the Christian system be connected with its present importance ; unless the work finished on Calvary be perceived in its relation to the personal fears and hopes of ourselves as individuals ; we do not understand, and therefore cannot believe the Gospel.

There is a belief in Christianity as a subject of controversy, which deserves a severer



censure than merely that it is incapable of doing any moral good. The great facts of revelation are not the object of which this belief is the impression. The real object of faith in a believer of this order is, that his view is right, and that of his opponents wrong. The impression from this object is naturally approbation of himself and contempt of others.

A man who forms a judgment upon any subject on reasonable grounds, cannot but believe that an opposite judgment is wrong—if he does not believe this, he has formed no judgment on the matter. But this ought not to be the prominent object of belief. If it be, the character is ruined. There is not in the world a more hateful thing, than to see the Gospel of Jesus Christ converted into a piece of ambitious scholarship—an angel of light and peace, transformed into the demon of darkness and discord. We are required to give our belief to the Gospel, for a farther end. Our belief is not to terminate in itself. Indeed it cannot do this, for every object which affects our belief must necessarily affect our characters. The object presented to our faith in the Gospel, is the character of God manifested in Jesus Christ, as the just God and yet the Saviour. It is the remission of sins through the blood of atonement shed for us by love unutterable. It is God in our nature

standing on our behalf as our elder Brother and Representative, bearing the punishment which we had deserved, satisfying the law which we had broken, and on the ground of this finished work, proclaiming sin forgiven, and inviting the chief and the most wretched of sinners to become a happy child of God for ever and ever. This object is presented to our belief, that it may stamp on our souls its own image, the likeness of God. The precepts of Scripture describe accurately the effect which this faith will produce on the character. We are thus taught to refer the defects in our character to corresponding defects in our faith. We have either originally received an erroneous impression of the Gospel, that is to say, we have misunderstood it, or else we have allowed, by forgetfulness, the right impression to die away. The doctrine of the atonement is the great spiritual mould from which the living form of the Christian character is to derive its features. Could we closely and accurately fill out and follow this mould in all its lineaments, though we had never heard of the precepts, our hearts would present an exact tally or counterpart to them. But as our deceitful hearts are prone to leave this true mould of holiness and happiness, and to receive opposite impressions from the perishing things about us, it has pleased God to describe to us what we ought to be, as well

in duty to Him, as for our own peace, that by daily comparing ourselves with his law, we may daily see not only how greatly we need the blood which cleanseth from sin, but also how far our moral features are from the form of the Gospel mould, and how unsteady and unfrequent our view must have been of that truth which sanctifieth. We are thus instructed to look into the precepts for an explanation of any difficulties which we may have as to the true object of faith. If any view which is taken of the Gospel, does not naturally produce on the mind that impression which is described in the precepts, it is evidently an incorrect view. This is a test which cannot fail, and in which we cannot easily be deceived. Thus, Christians are commanded to rejoice alway; and in the history which is given of them, we find that they did rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Now we are certain that they could not rejoice merely because they were commanded to do so. A precept of this kind could not possibly enforce or elicit obedience to itself. The great use of the precept therefore is, that we may by it, as by a test, try whether our view of the Gospel is a right view, and whether our application to it is steady and constant. And this joy in the first Christians was not the result of a long process—they rejoiced as soon as they heard the Gospel, and continued

rejoicing as long as they lived. Their joy, therefore, did not proceed from the observation of any moral improvement which had taken place in themselves; there was no time for that; but it proceeded from their perceiving, that the Gospel contained good news, perfectly adapted to persons in their circumstances of sin and sorrow. In short, it was an annunciation of pardon and favour from God to sinners, on account of a great work which preserved from all stain the Divine holiness, and which magnified the law and made it honourable. Whoever understands this, and believes it, must, in the nature of things, rejoice, unless the spring of the mind is clogged or deranged by the disease of the body. A condemned criminal must rejoice in a pardon, unless he thinks that death is no evil, and life no blessing. But it is impossible that any one can think eternal misery no evil, or eternal happiness no blessing. And deliverance from the one, and an entrance into the other, are embraced in the announcement of the Gospel. "This is the testimony that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son," 1 John. v. 11. A want of joy must then proceed from some defect in the view which we take of the Gospel, or from the unfrequency of our viewing it, and the admission of opposite impressions from other things. If we wish to see

the reflection of an object in a mirror, the object must be present to the mirror ; so if we wish to rejoice, we must have the joyful object present to our minds. An attempt to feel the joy of the Gospel when the testimony of the Gospel is not present to our minds, is like an attempt to have an object reflected in a mirror, without presenting them to each other.

We are commanded to love God with all our hearts, and to hate sin and flee from it. But it is not by the direct attempt to excite and work up in ourselves these affections, that we can ever hope, in the nature of things, to render an acceptable obedience to this precept. For who can love, by endeavouring to love ; or hate, by endeavouring to hate ? No : We are not left to such a thankless task. In the Gospel, a view of God is presented which allures the love of the heart, and calls forth its horror and indignation against whatever opposes His holy will. The law is written in our hearts by the belief of the Gospel. If our hearts really came in contact with the whole of the Gospel, the impression would be the whole of the law ; and we may determine how much of the Gospel we are yet strangers to, by observing how much of the law is yet unwritten on our hearts. This is the true method of self-examination. The distance which lay between the throne of the universe and the death of

the cross, is the measure at once of the love of God, and of the danger and guilt of sin. If there is not an impression on our hearts of holy love to God and of abhorrence of sin, it is because we either have a wrong view of the work of Christ, or because we do not view it at all. Let then the discovery of our spiritual deficiency teach us to study the truth as it is in Jesus more attentively, and to cleave more closely to it. If we really lived in the faith of the Gospel, we would live in uninterrupted joy, and love, and obedience.

We are standing on the brink of eternity ; in a few days we shall be launched into it. Let us look over the precipice before we make the awful plunge. It is a dark and untried region. Do you see any light, or will you commit yourself to chance? Oh, in the midst of that obscurity, there shines a bright Star, which, even whilst we gaze on it, sends its own blessed light into the heart, and expels thence all doubts and anxieties! The King of that country is he who died here for sinners. He loved us, and gave himself for us. And he hath gone to prepare a place for his people. If you belong to him, you are safe, and you may belong to him to-day.—When he becomes your hope, you will have a joyful hope—a hope that maketh not ashamed. But till then, there is no hope for you. With him is the fountain of life, that is

of happiness, and we deceive ourselves when we look for true happiness elsewhere. When our hearts wander from him, they wander from life and joy. Abide in me, he says, and I will abide in you. What are all the promises which the world can make in comparison of this ?

It may appear to some that I have given rather a complex view of faith. Some writers have thought that they simplified faith very much, by saying that it is a mere assent to the truth of Divine testimony. I consider it to be no more ; but then is it not obvious that its simplicity or complexness depends entirely on the nature of the testimony to which the assent is given ? An assent cannot be given to any thing without receiving an impression corresponding to it in all respects ; for the meaning of belief is just the impression made on the mind by the object presented to it. If the object be simple, the impression or belief will be simple ; and if the object be complex the impression or belief will be complex also. Now as the Gospel addresses a variety of affections in the human mind, and manifests a variety of the Divine attributes, it cannot in one sense be called very simple ; at the same time, as its meaning is level to the simplest capacity, that is to say, as the actions of which it gives the narration, do most unequivocally declare the principles from which

they proceed ; in this respect it may be called simple. It may be added, that as faith is the same *in itself*, whatever be its object, it may therefore be called simple ; though, when its object embraces a variety of subjects, it may in consequence of *this*, be called complex.

Sometimes the expression *simple faith* is used to denote faith unaccompanied with strong feelings of hope and of joy, and such like sensations. This may respect certain parts of the truth which have the effect of producing an acknowledgment of the faithfulness and kindness of God, a conviction that his favour is the one thing needful, a renunciation of all other hopes, an expectation of deliverance, and a desire after God, while yet there is no joy, because other parts of the truth are not clearly discerned. Such a state of mind, in regard to the revelations made to David, is described in the 42d and 43d psalms. Even in such cases, however, there is a kind and degree of sensation produced in correspondence to what is really believed, so that the expression in question is scarcely correct. Faith in the Gospel will produce peace and joy in proportion to its strength, except when disease or constitutional tendencies prevent its natural operation : and when these fruits are wanting, we may consider the question as put, where is your faith ? The human mind is easily shaken. Pain or weakness, sorrow or



anxiety, temptation or remorse, may distract the mind, and mingle their dark impressions with the glory of the Gospel salvation. It may please God to permit a jarring nerve, or a morbid sensitiveness of frame, to mar Christian joy even to the grave. It is seldom, however, that this state of mind, through the effect of natural causes, is *altogether* blameless. Has the Gospel remedy been steadily applied? Have self-indulgence and indolence been steadily resisted? When we apply the term *simplicity* to faith, we are generally understood to mean unreservedness and unfeignedness of principle in religion, and an unquestioning dependence on the love of God in Christ, as the only hope and desire of the soul. This is the child-like spirit which is so much commended in Scripture, and holy peace dwells with it.

Some persons, again, when they speak of *simple faith*, seem to view it as a mere absence of expressed dissent, or as a readiness to sign their names at the foot of a creed or a set of church-articles, as a proffer of their sanction and countenance to this or that system. To this it is a sufficient answer, that nothing can be correctly believed, unless it makes a correct impression on the mind. The belief is merely an appendage and seal to the impression, and unless our impression of Christianity correspond to all the high ob-

jects revealed in the Gospel, the simplicity of our faith will not ensure its goodness.

There is another way in which the expression *simple faith* is used, namely, to express the freeness of justification. We become interested in the salvation of the Gospel simply by believing the divine testimony, and not as a reward of the spiritual fruits or accompaniments of our faith. For the glory of Divine grace then, and also for the steadiness of our own comfort and peace, it is of great moment that our ideas on this subject be simple. When we confound faith with its effects, either immediate or remote, we mar the simplicity and the conclusiveness of the reasoning of Scripture on the total opposition between faith and works in the matter of justification.

We see thus the connexion between faith in the Gospel and sanctification ; but how is it related to justification or pardon ? What is the meaning of such a sentence as this, "A man is justified by faith without works ?" In such affirmations, the expression "by faith" means simply, the gratuitousness of the gift of pardon. Paul says, "therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace," or free mercy, Rom. iv. 16. Faith is here directly contrasted with works or merits, as it is also in all passages where justification is the subject. We have frequent examples in the Bible of the Gospel being stated without any

mention of faith: Thus, "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," 1 Tim. i. 15; as also 1 John v. 11. Matt. xi. 28. Luke xix. 10; but in these instances the necessity of faith is always implied, because they are either invitations to come to the Saviour, that is, to believe on him; or they are declarations, that no unworthiness is a bar to his salvation, if men will come to him. But another reason of the connexion between justification and faith lies in this, that faith in the Gospel produces a conformity to the character of God. Pardon could not be enjoyed by those whose characters were unrenewed, and faith is the only instrument by which a spiritual change can be effected. Pardon is bestowed on sinners, because Christ hath suffered the punishment which they deserved, and hath magnified the law which they had dishonoured—and not on account of any good thing in themselves. That pardon may be freely obtained through Christ, is the very thing which we are called on to believe, and in believing this we come to the actual possession of it. The act of amnesty is antecedent to our belief, and independent of it—it remains firm and good, though we scout it and reject it; but by so doing, we exclude ourselves from its operation. Each individual becomes specially in-

terested in this amnesty, by his belief of it—which special interest is called by the Scripture justification. This belief gives the right direction to the affections, by presenting to them their proper objects—it restores their languid or feverish pulsation to a healthful tone—it expands and elevates them so, that they take delight in God, and in the way of all his commandments—it thus brings the worms of the earth into union with the King of Heaven, by introducing their hearts into the enjoyment of that glorious work, in which His infinite mind rests with eternal complacency. This is generally called sanctification or the renewing of the heart, begun on earth completed in heaven. It is a process perfectly reasonable and intelligible on the acknowledged principles of the science of the human mind. It is quite reasonable, surely, in a moral point of view, that justification should be thus connected with faith in the Divine testimony, seeing that faith is intelligibly connected, by the very constitution of nature, with a restoration to that spiritual character, which can alone fit for communion with God, or the happiness of heaven.

But still let it be distinctly remembered and felt, that the pardon of sin rests on a work altogether independent of the faith, or love, or obedience of man. The Friend, and Brother, and Representative of sinners, has borne

“ the chastisement of their peace,” and satisfied the demands of justice on their behalf. The sentence has been executed, and the records of heaven bear that “ it is finished.” The Divine gracious determination to pardon sinners through Christ, is freely and universally proclaimed as an act already passed, in the history of that great work on which it rests ; and all are invited to come in and partake of the protection and healing influence of the pardon thus freely proclaimed. Those who believe in it are gradually sanctified by it. But let it not be supposed that they are gradually pardoned by it. The pardon was *virtually* obtained by Christ before they ever heard of it. By unbelief they would have excluded themselves from its protection, as well as influence, altogether. What is the object of faith but that our salvation is from first to last the fruit of pure favour ; and how can the necessity of believing it to be a free gift, be inconsistent with its being such ? By believing it, they come under its protection ; and, according to the degree of their faith, is their enjoyment of it, and their conformity to its spirit. He who believes the Divine testimony that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, is within the scope of the pardon ; but according to the vividness, the constancy, and the distinctness of the impressions which this truth makes on his mind, will be his Chris-

tian stature and spiritual joy. We are told that in the heavenly world, there are great varieties of glory and happiness. The lowest seat in that kingdom into which neither sin nor sorrow enter, is surely far beyond the brightest conceptions of our earthly minds, and, Oh how opposite to our deserts ! but yet, we are encouraged to aim high, and to cultivate a holy ambition to be near and like our Lord. The way to this attainment is to walk by faith whilst we are here ; to have the cross and the glory of the Saviour ever present to the heart, as the springs of holy love and holy hope ; to receive the events and duties of life as the wholesome exercises by which he tries and strengthens the faith of his people ; to look to him continually for abundant supplies of his comforting and quickening Spirit ; to consider ourselves as the blood-bought children of our Father, whose eye is ever upon us, whose ear is ever open to us, whose arm ever supports us, whose love changeth not, and to be in longing and watchful expectation of the hour, when he will call us hence to the full enjoyment of our inheritance ; to feel that our eternity has already begun, that our final choice is irrevocably made, and that in this world and out of this world, and in all possible circumstances of existence, Christ is and must be our only full and satisfying portion forever.

My object in this Essay has not been to re-

present faith as a difficult or perplexed operation, but to withdraw the attention from the act of believing, and to fix it on the object of belief, by showing that we cannot believe any moral fact without entering into its spirit, and meaning, and importance; that we cannot believe in our own danger without apprehension, or in our own deliverance without joy; and that we cannot believe in generous compassion, or self-sacrificing benevolence, without having on our minds at the time impressions corresponding to these affections; just as we cannot believe in a colour, unless we recal to our minds the impression corresponding to that colour. Even had there been no mention of faith made through the whole Bible, it is yet evident to common sense that its communications could be profitable to none, but to those who believe them; and it is no less evident that, unless these communications are understood, they cannot be believed in their true meaning. Our business then is to understand the meaning of those communications which God has been pleased to make to us in his word, and to receive them as substantial realities altogether independent of our admission or rejection. Certain facts have taken place, and certain principles exist in the government of the universe, whether we believe them or not. Our disbelief of them neither destroys their existence, nor takes from

their importance; they continue the same, and will continue to exercise an unlimited and uncontrollable influence over our destinies for ever. These facts and principles declare the character of God, and it is life eternal to know them. To reject them, is to clash with Omnipotence; and to be ignorant of them, is to be in moral darkness.

We must prosecute our inquiries on this subject, not as critics, or judges, or scholars, but as sinners. It is not an interesting exercise for our faculties, but a pardon for our sins, and a cure for our spiritual diseases, that we must seek after. If we seek, we shall find, and we shall find them in Jesus Christ. But the discovery, though it will gladden, will not elevate. The great end for which we are called on to believe the Gospel is, that we may be conformed by it to the likeness of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. Our obedience to the law of God is thus the measure of our faith in the Gospel. Holy love to God and man is the natural fruit of faith in the Gospel, and it is also the fulfilling of the law.

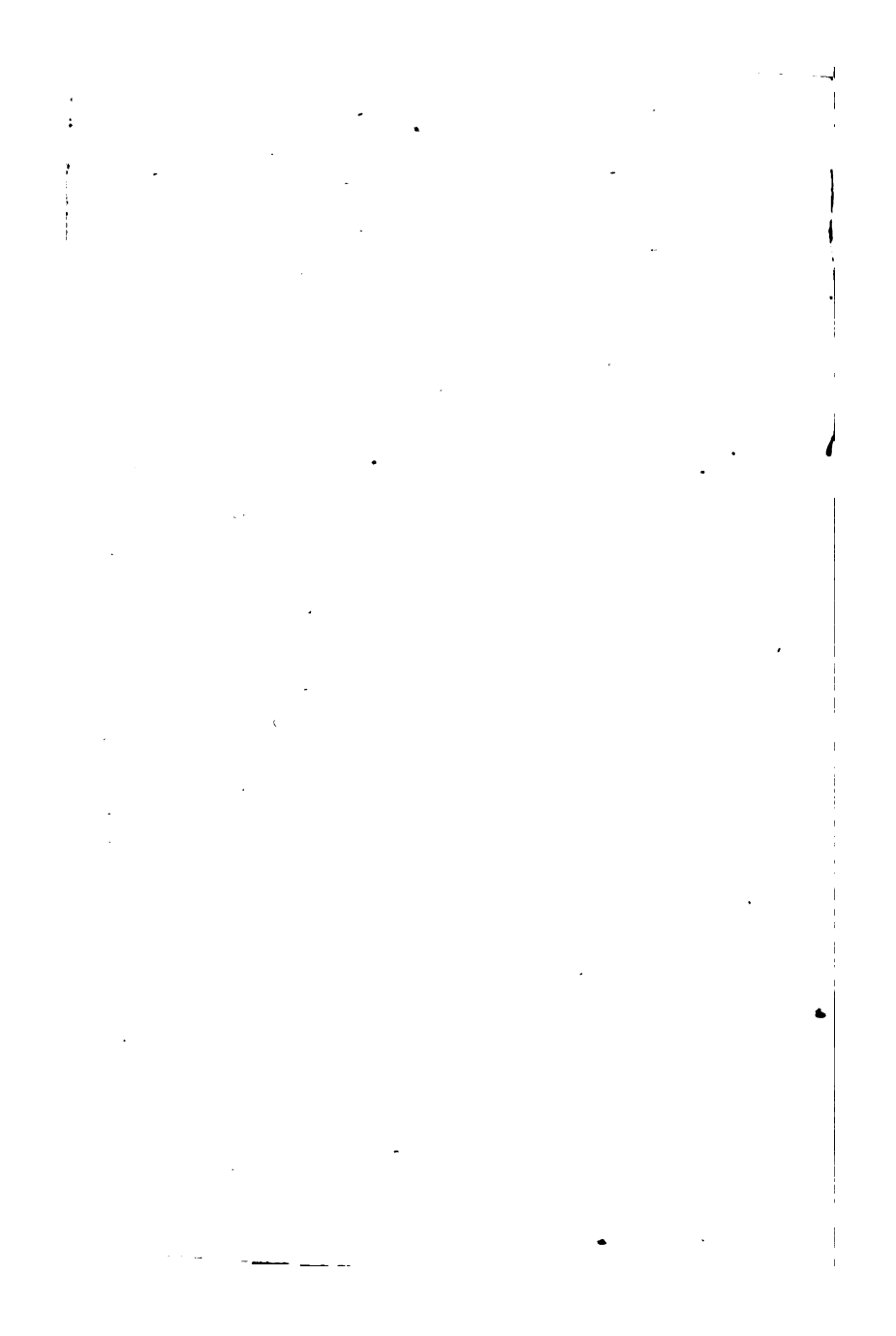
In conclusion, I would caution the reader (and I desire to take the caution to my own heart) against entering on these things in his own strength. There is an agent necessary in this matter, whose operation is wonderful, whose high and gracious office it is, to take of the things that are Christ's and show them

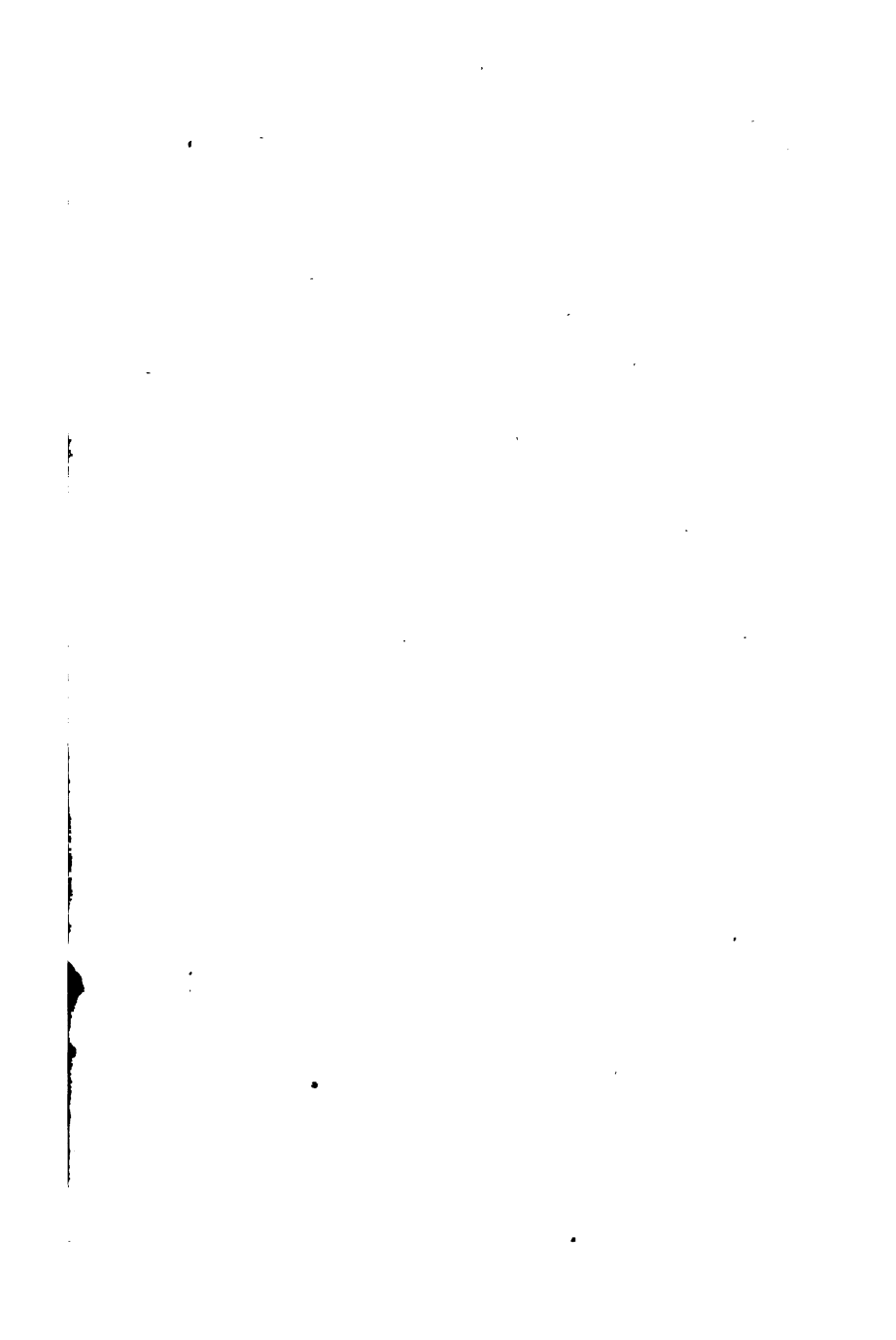


to the souls of sinners, and without whom no son of man has ever believed unto everlasting life. An absolute and child-like dependence on the Holy Spirit for light, and strength, and comfort, is a constituent part of the Christian character. The work of restoration, in all its parts, and in all its glory, is God's. The deepest humility is thus necessarily connected with the highest confidence. He who knows that the Almighty hath entered the field in this cause, and that on his arm the cause rests, will, while he feels his own utter insignificance, yet confidently anticipate the result. That anticipation must be weakened by whatever confidence he may place in himself. The assistance of this agent is one of the gifts which Christ now reigns to bestow. It is given to those who ask it, and those who receive it, live with God for ever. Oh what will one day be the feelings of those who have not asked it, and therefore have not received it!

THE END.







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THE BEQUEST OF  
**JOSEPH HENRY THAYER**  
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